



AN  
ESSAY  
ON THE  
DRAMATIC CHARACTER  
OF  
SIR JOHN FALSTAFF.



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SIR JOHN FALSTAFF.

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BY MAURICE MORGANN, ESQ.

FORMERLY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE

I AM NOT JOHN OF GAUNT, YOUR GRANDFATHER, BUT YET NO COWARD, HAL  
*First Part of Henry IV*

NEW EDITION.

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# PREFACE

TO THE PRESENT EDITION.



THIS Essay is re-published, from a conviction, that to rescue so happy an effort of genius from the unmerited obscurity in which it has been involved by the silent progress of time, would be an acceptable service to the lover of literature:—that resiliency, which so frequently accompanies merit, prevented the appearance of a second edition, during the life of the author; it has therefore long been confined to the shelves of the curious, and the reader has thus been deprived of what may justly be deemed a literary treasure;—a work more distin-

guished by *originality* and nice discrimination, has seldom appeared.

To *define* the varying hue of Sir John's character, is no easy task ; but the eccentric humourist is here delineated with such ingenious and playful irony ; his follies, or, we should perhaps say, his vices, are placed in such artful contrast with the few virtues attributed to him ; that the work must ever yield both delight and information : the principles on which the dramatic characters of Shakespeare are formed, are incidentally discussed with such a felicitous combination of acuteness and elegance, that it is apprehended there are few who will not, from its perusal, be enabled to appreciate more justly the merits of the great bard, of whom an elegant critic has said, "for centuries to come, his fame will continue to gather strength, (like an Alpine *avalanche*,) at every period of its descent."

MAURICE MORGANN, Esq. the ingenious writer of this work, descended from an an-

tient and respectable family in Wales; he filled the office of under Secretary of State to the late Marquis of Lansdown, during his first administration; and was afterwards Secretary to the Embassy for ratifying the peace with America, in 1783. He died at his house in Knightsbridge, in the seventy-seventh year of his age, on the 28th March, 1802. On his lamented decease, many memorials of his varied powers were destroyed; but Dr. Symmons and Mr. W. Cooke have produced elegant and friendly tributes to Mr. Morgann's character and attainments, which the following passages will enable the reader of taste to appreciate.

“This Essay forms a more honourable monument to the memory of Shakespeare, than any which has been reared to him by the united labours of his commentators. The portrait, of which I have exhibited only a part, is drawn with so just, so discriminating, and so vivid, a pencil, as to be un-

equalled, unless it be by the celebrated delineation of the same great dramatist by the hand of Dryden.

“He discharged with honour the office of under Secretary of State when the late Marquis of Lansdown was for the first time in power, and he was subsequently sent by that nobleman across the Atlantic, as the intended legislator of Canada. His public and his private life were impelled by the same principles to the same object;—by the love of liberty and virtue, to the happiness of man. He has been importuned in vain to give a second edition of his *Essay on Falstaff*; and his repeated injunctions have impelled his executors to an indiscriminate destruction of his papers, some of which, in the walks of politics, metaphysics, and criticism, would have planted a permanent laurel on his grave”\*.

Dr. Symmons's *Life of Milton*, 8vo. 1810, pages 122—4.

“ With a view of general knowledge, and a large and early acquaintance with the higher circles of society, Mr. Morgann availed himself of both, for the laudable purpose of forming his mind, improving his morals, and polishing his taste. All that he read, heard, or saw, sufficiently valuable to be noticed, became his own, where, by a peculiar *tournure* of mind, they received such a happy and appropriate organization, as to render every thing new, pleasing, and diversified : hence, he was the charm of every society he mixed with ; particularly, as his conversation was enriched with the greatest urbanity of manners, and the happiest arts of *badinage* and pleasantry.

“ As a man, he stood detached from the general contagion of the age he lived in, neither complying with the vices of the great, however familiar or seductive, nor with their frivolities, however general or imposing. His mind was compounded of pure and simple elements, which insepara-

bly mixed in his business, his friendships, and general intercourse with mankind ; and it was often no less pleasing to his friends, than to the lovers of virtue in general, to see with what superior lustre those plain but prepossessing colours outshone the glare of fashion, and the accommodating varnish of modern morals.

“ A mind, thus fraught with the love of truth and inquiry, never yielded to the apathy of repose, or the indolence of careless dissipation ; his leisure hours were therefore frequently employed upon some curious or useful literary subject ; amongst which, were particularly noticed, his ‘ Remarks on the Slave Trade,’ and his ‘ Essay on the Character of Sir John Falstaff.’ In the first will be found the seeds of most of those arguments, which have since been so successfully urged in favour of the rights of humanity ; and in the latter, the spirit of the poet himself breathing through his commentator. I have often read, with pleasure

and improvement, the character of Shakespeare, as drawn by Dryden, Pope, Johnson, and others; but in Morgann we feel him commanding every passage from the head to the heart; and the apology which he assigns to Aristotle, for his name being improperly used by '*his wretched officers, Rymer and other commentators,*' is one of the most luminous and critical defences of Shakespeare's not being bound by the unities, which perhaps has ever been produced. It is, as has been elegantly said by the late ingenious Mr. Seward, 'The portrait of Homer painted by Apelles,' and must make all *amateurs* of the drama lament, that he had not employed more of his leisure hours in the same literary pursuit; we should then see our great poet of nature illustrated, as he should be, by the critic of nature and congenial taste.

"Such was the friend to whom we have often listened with the most gratified attention,—whether on the excursive, variegated,



wing of fancy, or on the firmer basis of moral inquiry ; for he was, in all situations, ‘ a man,’ (to use the simple yet energetic words of Sir Philip Sidney,) ‘ possessing high erected thoughts, seated in a heart of curtesy.’

VALE !”\*

\* Preface to “ Conversation,” a didactic Poem, by W. Cooke, Esq. 12mo. 1807.

*November, 1819*

THE AUTHOR'S  
P R E F A C E.

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THE following sheets were written in consequence of a friendly conversation, turning by some chance upon the character of FALSTAFF, wherein the writer, maintaining, contrary to the general opinion, that this character was not intended to be shewn as *a coward*, was challenged to deliver and support that opinion from the press, with an engagement, now he fears forgotten, for it was three years ago, that he should be answered through the same channel. Thus stimulated, these papers were almost wholly written in a very short time, but not without

those attentions, whether successful or not, which seemed necessary to carry them beyond the press, into the hands of the Public. From the influence of the foregoing circumstances it is, that the writer has generally assumed rather the character and tone of an advocate, than of an inquirer;—though, if he had not first *inquired* and been *convinced*, he should never have attempted to have amused either himself or others with the subject.—The impulse of the occasion, however, being passed, the papers were thrown by, and almost forgotten; but have been looked into of late by some friends, who, observing that the writer had not enlarged so far for the sake of Falstaff alone, but that the argument was made subservient to critical amusement, persuaded him to revise and convey it to the press. This has been accordingly done, though he fears something too hastily, as he found it proper to add, while the papers were in the course of printing, some consi-

derations on the *whole* character of Falstaff, which ought to have been accompanied by a slight reform of a few preceding passages, which may seem, in consequence of this addition, to contain too favourable a representation of his morals.

The vindication of Falstaff's courage is truly no otherwise the object, than some old fantastic oak, or grotesque rock, may be the object of a morning's ride; yet, being proposed as such, may serve to limit the distance, and shape the course. The real object is exercise, and the delight which a rich, beautiful, picturesque, and perhaps unknown, country, may excite from every side. Such an exercise may admit of some little excursion, keeping however the road in view; but seems to exclude every appearance of labour and of toil.—Under the impression of such feelings, the writer has endeavoured to preserve to his text a certain lightness of air, and cheerfulness of

tone; but is sensible, however, that the manner of discussion does not *every where*, particularly near the commencement, sufficiently correspond with his design.—If the book shall be fortunate enough to obtain another impression, a separation may be made; and such of the heavier parts as cannot be wholly dispensed with, sink to their more proper station,—a note.

He is fearful, likewise, that he may have erred in the other extreme; and that, having thought himself entitled, even in argument, to a certain degree of playful discussion, he may have pushed it, in a few places, even to levity. This error might be yet more easily reformed than the other.—The book is perhaps, as it stands, too bulky for the subject; but, if the reader knew how many pressing considerations, as it grew into size, the author resisted, which yet seemed entitled to be heard, he would the more readily excuse him.

The whole is a mere experiment, and the writer considers it as such: it may have the advantages, but it is likewise attended with all the difficulties and dangers, of *novelty*.



AN  
ESSAY,  
*&c. &c.*

THE ideas which I have formed concerning the *courage* and military character of the dramatic Sir John Falstaff, are so different from those which I find generally to prevail in the world, that I shall take the liberty of stating my sentiments on the subject; in hope that some person, as unengaged as myself, will either correct and reform my error in this respect; or, joining himself to my opinion, redeem me from, what I may call, the reproach of singularity.



I am to avow, then, that I do not clearly discern that Sir John Falstaff deserves to bear the character so generally given him, of an absolute coward; or, in other words, that I do not conceive Shakespeare ever meant to make cowardice an essential part of his constitution.

I know how universally the contrary opinion prevails; and I know what respect and deference are due to the public voice. But if to the avowal of this singularity, I add all the reasons that have led me to it, and acknowledge myself to be wholly in the judgment of the public, I shall hope to avoid the censure of too much forwardness or indecorum.

It must, in the first place, be admitted, that the appearances in this case are singularly strong and striking; and so they had need be, to become the ground of so general a censure. We see this extraordinary character, almost in the first moment of our acquaintance with him, involved in circuni-

stances of apparent dishonour ; and we hear him familiarly called *coward* by his most intimate companions. We see him, on occasion of the robbery at Gads-Hill, in the very act of running away from the Prince and Poins ; and we behold him, on another of more honourable obligation, in open daylight, in battle, and acting in his profession as a soldier, escaping from Douglas even out of the world, as it were ; counterfeiting death, and deserting his very existence ; and we find him, on the former occasion, betrayed into those *lies* and *braggadocioes*, which are the usual concomitants of cowardice in military men, and pretenders to valour. These are not only in themselves strong circumstances, but they are moreover thrust forward, pressed upon our notice as the subject of our mirth, as the great business of the scene : no wonder, therefore, that the word should go forth, that Falstaff is exhibited as a character of cowardice and dishonour.

What there is to the contrary of this, it is my business to discover. Much, I think, will presently appear; but it lies so dispersed, is so latent, and so purposely obscured, that the reader must have some patience whilst I collect it into one body, and make it the object of a steady and regular contemplation.

But what have we to do, may my readers exclaim, with principles *so latent, so obscured*? In dramatic composition, the *impression is the fact*; and the writer, who, meaning to impress one thing, has impressed another, is unworthy of observation.

It is a very unpleasant thing to have, in the first setting out, so many and so strong prejudices to contend with. All that one can do in such a case, is, to pray the reader to have a little patience in the commencement; and to reserve his censure, if it must pass, for the conclusion. Under his gracious allowance, therefore, I presume to declare it as my opinion, that cowardice *is not*

the *impression*, which the *whole* character of Falstaff is calculated to make on the minds of an unprejudiced audience; though there be, I confess, a great deal of something in the *composition* likely enough to puzzle, and consequently to mislead the understanding. The reader will perceive that I distinguish between *mental impressions*, and the *understanding*.—I wish to avoid every thing that looks like subtlety and refinement; but this is a distinction which we all comprehend.—There are none of us unconscious of certain feelings or sensations of mind, which do not seem to have passed through the understanding; the effects, I suppose, of some secret influences from without, acting upon a certain mental sense, and producing feelings and passions in just correspondence to the force and variety of those influences on the one hand, and to the quickness of our sensibility on the other. Be the cause, however, what it may, the fact is undoubtedly so; which is all I am concerned in.

And it is equally a fact, which every man's experience may avouch, that the understanding and those feelings are frequently at variance. The latter often arise from the most minute circumstances, and frequently from such as the understanding cannot estimate, or even recognize; whereas, the understanding delights in abstraction, and in general propositions; which, however true, considered as such, are very seldom, I had like to have said *never*, perfectly applicable to any particular case. And hence, among other causes, it is, that we often condemn or applaud characters and actions, on the credit of some logical process, while our hearts revolt, and would fain lead us to a very different conclusion.

The understanding seems, for the most part, to take cognizance of *actions* only, and from these, to infer *motives* and *character*; but the sense we have been speaking of proceeds in a contrary course, and determines of *actions*, from certain *first principles*

*of character*, which seem wholly out of the reach of the understanding. We cannot indeed do otherwise than admit that there must be distinct principles of character in every distinct individual : the manifest variety, even in the minds of infants, will oblige us to this. But what *are* these first principles of character ? Not the objects, I am persuaded, of the understanding ; and yet we take as strong impressions of them as if we could compare and assort them in a syllogism. We often love or hate at first sight ; and indeed, in general, dislike or approve by some secret reference to these *principles* ; and we judge even of conduct, not from any idea of abstract good or evil in the nature of actions, but by referring those actions to a supposed original character in the man himself. I do not mean that we *talk* thus ; we could not indeed, if we would, explain ourselves in detail on this head ; we can neither account for impressions and passions, nor communicate them to others

by *words*: tones and looks will sometimes convey the *passion* strangely, but the *impression* is incommunicable. The same causes may produce it indeed at the same time in many, but it is the separate possession of each, and not in its nature transferable; it is an imperfect sort of instinct, and proportionably dumb.—We might indeed, if we chose it, candidly confess to one another, that we are greatly swayed by these feelings, and are by no means so *rational* in all points as we could wish; but this would be a betraying of the interests of that high faculty, the understanding, which we so value ourselves upon, and which we more peculiarly call our own. This, we think, must not be; and so we huddle up the matter, concealing it as much as possible, both from ourselves and others. In books indeed, wherein character, motive, and action, are all alike subjected to the understanding, it is generally a very clear case, and we make decisions compounded of them all:

and thus we are willing to approve of Candide, though he kills my Lord the Inquisitor, and runs through the body the Baron of Thunder-ten-tronchk, the son of his patron, and the brother of his beloved Cunégonde : but in real life, I believe, my *Lords the Judges* would be apt to inform the *Gentlemen of the Jury*, that my Lord the Inquisitor was ill killed ; as Candide did not proceed on the urgency of the moment, but on the speculation only of future evil. And indeed this clear perception, in novels and plays, of the union of character and action not seen in nature, is the principal defect of such compositions, and what renders them but ill pictures of human life, and wretched guides of conduct.

But if there was *one man* in the world, who could make a more perfect draught of real nature, and steal such impressions on his audience, without their special notice, as should keep their hold in spite of any error of their understanding, and should



thereupon venture to introduce an apparent incongruity of character and action, for ends which I shall presently endeavour to explain; such an imitation would be worth our nicest curiosity and attention. But in such a case as this, the reader might expect that he should find us all talking the language of the understanding only; that is, censuring the action with very little conscientious investigation even of *that*; and transferring the censure, in every odious colour, to the actor himself; how much soever our hearts and affections might secretly revolt: for, as to the *impression*, we have already observed<sup>d</sup> that it has no tongue; nor is its operation and influence likely to be made the subject of conference and communication.

It is not to the *courage*, only, of Falstaff that we think these observations will apply: no part whatever of his character seems to be fully settled in our minds; at least, there is something strangely incongruous in our

discourse and affections concerning him. We all like *Old Jack*; yet, by some strange perverse fate, we all abuse him, and deny him the possession of any one single good or respectable quality. There is something extraordinary in this : it must be a strange art in Shakespeare which can draw our liking and good-will towards so offensive an object. He has wit, it will be said, cheerfulness, and humour, of the most characteristic and captivating sort. And is this enough? Is the humour and gaiety of vice so very captivating? Is the wit, characteristic of baseness and every ill quality, capable of attaching the heart and winning the affections? Or does not the apparency of such humour, and the flashes of such wit, by more strongly disclosing the deformity of character, but the more effectually excite our hatred and contempt of the man? And yet this is not our *feeling* of Falstaff's character. When he has ceased to amuse us, we find no emotions of disgust; we can

scarcely forgive the ingratitude of the Prince, in the new-born virtue of the King, and we curse the severity of that poetic justice which consigns our old good-natured delightful companion to the custody of the *warden*, and the dishonours of the *Fleet*.

I am willing, however, to admit, that if a dramatic writer will but preserve, to any character, the qualities of a strong mind, particularly courage and ability, it will be afterwards no very difficult task (as I may have occasion to explain) to discharge that *disgust* which arises from vicious manners; and even to attach us (if such character should contain any quality productive of cheerfulness and laughter) to the cause and subject of our mirth, with some degree of affection.

But the question which I am to consider is of a very different nature : it is a question of fact, and concerning a quality which forms the basis of every respectable character; a quality which is the very essence

of a military man ; and which is held up to us, in almost every comic incident of the play, as the subject of our observation. It is strange then that it should now be a question, whether Falstaff is or is not a man of courage ; and whether we do in fact condemn him for the want, or respect him for the possession, of that quality : and yet I believe the reader will find that he has by no means decided this question, even for himself.—If then it should turn out, that this difficulty has arisen out of the art of Shakespeare, who has contrived to make secret impressions upon us of courage, and to preserve those impressions in favour of a character which was to be held up for sport and laughter, on account of actions of *apparent* cowardice and dishonour, we shall have less occasion to wonder, as Shakespeare is a name which contains all of dramatic artifice and genius.

If, in this place, the reader shall peevishly and prematurely object, that the observa-

tions and distinctions I have laboured to establish, are wholly inapplicable, he being himself unconscious of ever having received any such impression; what can be done in so nice a case, but to refer him to the following pages; by the number of which, he may judge how very much I respect his objection, and by the variety of those proofs which I shall employ to induce him to part with it; and to recognize in its stead certain feelings, concealed and covered over perhaps, but not erased, by time, reasoning, and authority.

In the mean while, it may not perhaps be easy for him to resolve how it comes about, that whilst we look upon Falstaff as a character of the like nature with that of Parolles or of Bobadil, we should preserve for *him* a great degree of respect and goodwill, and yet feel the highest disdain and contempt of the others, though they are all involved in similar situations. The reader, I believe, would wonder extremely to find

either Parolles or Bobadil possess himself in danger: what then can be the cause that we are not at all surprised at the gaiety and ease of Falstaff under the most trying circumstances; and that we never think of charging Shakespeare with departing, on this account, from the truth and coherence of character? Perhaps, after all, the *real* character of Falstaff may be different from his *apparent* one; and, possibly, this difference between reality and appearance, whilst it accounts at once for our liking and our censure, may be the true point of humour in the character, and the source of all our laughter and delight. We may chance to find, if we will but examine a little into the nature of those circumstances which have accidentally involved him, that he was intended to be drawn as a character of much natural courage and resolution; and be obliged, thereupon, to repeal those decisions which may have been made upon the credit of some general, though inapplicable, pro-

positions; the common source of error in other and higher matters. A little reflection may perhaps bring us round again to the point of our departure, and unite our understandings to our instinct.—Let us then for a moment *suspend* at least our decisions, and candidly and coolly inquire if Sir John Falstaff be, indeed, what he has so often been called by critic and commentator, male and female,—a *constitutional coward*.

It will scarcely be possible to consider the courage of Falstaff as wholly detached from his other qualities: but I write not professedly of any part of his character but what is included under the term *courage*, however I may, incidentally, throw some lights on the whole.—The reader will not need to be told that this inquiry will resolve itself of course into a critique on the genius, the arts, and the conduct, of Shakespeare: for what is Falstaff, what Lear, what Hamlet, or Othello, but different modifications of Shakespeare's thought? It is

true that this inquiry is narrowed almost to a single point; but general criticism is as uninformative as it is easy: Shakespeare deserves to be considered in detail;—a task hitherto unattempted.

It may be proper, in the first place, to take a short view of all the parts of Falstaff's character, and then proceed to discover, if we can, what *impressions*, as to courage or cowardice, he had made on the persons of the drama: after which, we will examine, in course, such evidence, either of *persons* or *facts*, as are relative to the matter; and account as we may for those appearances, which seem to have led to the opinion of his constitutional cowardice.

The scene of the robbery, and the disgraces attending it, which stand first in the play, and introduce us to the knowledge of Falstaff, I shall beg leave (as I think this scene to have been the source of much unreasonable prejudice) to *reserve* till we are more fully acquainted with the whole



character of Falstaff; and I shall therefore hope that the reader will not for a time advert to it, or to the jests of the Prince or of Poins in consequence of that unlucky adventure.

In drawing out the parts of Falstaff's character, with which I shall begin this inquiry, I shall take the liberty of putting constitutional bravery into his composition; but the reader will be pleased to consider what I shall say in that respect as spoken hypothetically for the present, to be retained, or discharged out of it, as he shall finally determine.

To me, then, it appears that the leading quality in Falstaff's character, and that from which all the rest take their colour, is a high degree of wit and humour, accompanied with great natural vigour and alacrity of mind. This quality, so accompanied, led him probably very early into life, and made him highly acceptable to society; so acceptable, as to make it seem unnecessary

for him to acquire any other virtue. Hence, perhaps, his continued debaucheries and dissipations of every kind.—He seems, by nature, to have had a mind free from malice or any evil principle ; but he never took the trouble of acquiring any good one. He found himself esteemed and beloved with all his faults ; nay, *for* his faults, which were all connected with humour, and for the most part grew out of it. As he had, possibly, no vices but such as he thought might be openly professed, so he appeared more dissolute through ostentation. To the character of wit and humour, to which all his other qualities seem to have conformed themselves, he appears to have added a very necessary support, *that* of the profession of a *soldier*. He had from nature, as I presume to say, a spirit of boldness and enterprise ; which in a military age, though employment was only occasional, kept him always above contempt, secured him an honourable reception among the great, and

suited best both with his particular mode of humour and of vice. Thus living continually in society, nay even in taverns, and indulging himself, and being indulged by others, in every debauchery; drinking, whoring, gluttony, and ease; assuming a liberty of fiction, necessary perhaps to his wit, and often falling into falsity and lies; he seems to have set, by degrees, all sober reputation at defiance; and finding eternal resources in his wit, he borrows, shifts, defrauds, and even robs, without dishonour.—Laughter and approbation attend his greatest excesses; and, being governed visibly by no settled bad principle or ill design, fun and humour account for and cover all. By degrees, however, and through indulgence, he acquires bad habits, becomes a humourist, grows enormously corpulent, and falls into the infirmities of age; yet never quits, all the time, one single levity or vice of youth, or loses any of that cheerfulness of mind, which had enabled him to

pass through this course with ease to himself and delight to others ; and thus, at last, mixing youth and age, enterprise and corpulency, wit and folly, poverty and expense, title and buffoonery, innocence as to purpose, and wickedness as to practice ; neither incurring hatred by bad principle, nor contempt by cowardice, yet involved in circumstances productive of imputation in both ; a butt and a wit, a humourist and a man of humour, a touchstone and a laughing stock, a jester and a jest ; has Sir John Falstaff, taken at that period of his life in which we see him, become the most perfect comic character that perhaps ever was exhibited.

It may not possibly be wholly amiss to remark, in this place, that if Sir John Falstaff had possessed any of that cardinal quality, prudence, alike the guardian of virtue and the protector of vice ; that quality, from the possession or the absence of which, the character and fate of men in this life take, I think, their colour, and not from real vice

or virtue; if he had considered his wit, not as *principal*, but *accessary* only; as the instrument of power, and not as power itself; if he had had much baseness to hide, if he had had less of what may be called mellow-ness or good humour, or less of health and spirit; if he had spurred and rode the world with his wit, instead of suffering the world, boys and all, to ride him;—he might, without any other essential change, have been the admiration, and not the jest, of mankind: or if he had lived in our day, and instead of attaching himself to one Prince, had renounced *all* friendship and *all* attachment, and had let himself out as the ready instrument and zany of every successive minister, he might possibly have acquired the high honour of marking his shroud or decorating his coffin with the living rays of an Irish, at least, if not a British, coronet: instead of which, though enforcing laughter from every disposition, he appears, now, as such a character which every wise man will pity and

avoid, every knave will censure, and every fool will fear: and accordingly, Shakspeare, ever true to nature, has made Harry desert and Lancaster censure him:—he dies, where he lived, in a tavern, broken-hearted, without a friend; and his final exit is given up to the derision of fools. Nor have his misfortunes ended here; the scandal arising from the misapplication of his wit and talents seems immortal. He has met with as little justice or mercy from his final judges, the critics, as from his companions of the drama. With our cheeks still red with laughter, we ungratefully, as unjustly, censure him as a coward by nature, and a rascal upon principle: though, if this were so, it might be hoped, for our own credit, that we should behold him rather with disgust and disapprobation, than with pleasure and delight.

But to remember our question—*Is Falstaff a constitutional coward?*

With respect to every infirmity, except

that of cowardice, we must take him as at the period in which he is represented to us. If we see him dissipated, fat,—it is enough ; —we have nothing to do with his youth, when he might perhaps have been modest, chaste, “*and not an eagle’s talon in the waist.*” But *constitutional courage* extends to a man’s whole life, makes a part of his nature, and is not to be taken up or deserted like a mere moral quality. It is true, there is a courage founded upon *principle*, or rather a principle independent of courage, which will sometimes operate in spite of nature ; a principle, which prefers death to shame, but which always refers itself, in conformity to its own nature, to the prevailing modes of honour, and the fashions of the age. But natural courage is another thing : it is independent of opinion ; it adapts itself to occasions, preserves itself under every shape, and can avail itself of flight as well as of action. In the last war, some Indians of America, perceiving a line

of Highlanders to keep their station under every disadvantage, and under a fire which they could not effectually return, were so miserably mistaken in our points of honour as to conjecture, from observation on the habit and stability of those troops, that they were indeed the women of England, who wanted courage to run away. That courage which is founded in nature and constitution, Falstaff, as I presume to say, possessed ;—but I am ready to allow, that the principle already mentioned, so far as it refers to reputation only, began, with every other moral quality, to lose its hold on him in his old age ; that is, at the time of life in which he is represented to us ; a period, as it should seem, approaching to *seventy*.—The truth is, that he had drollery enough to support himself in credit without the point of honour, and had address enough to make even the preservation of his life a point of drollery. The reader knows I allude, though something prematurely, to his ficti-



tious death in the battle of Shrewsbury. This incident is generally construed to the disadvantage of Falstaff; it is a transaction which bears the external marks of cowardice; it is also aggravated to the spectators by the idle tricks of the player, who practises on this occasion all the attitudes and wild apprehensions of fear; more ambitious, as it should seem, of representing a Caliban than a Falstaff; or indeed rather a poor unwieldy miserable tortoise, than either. The painful comedian lies spread out on his belly, and not only covers himself all over with his robe as with a shell, but forms a kind of round tortoise-back, by I know not what stuffing or contrivance; in addition to which, he alternately lifts up, and depresses, and dodges, his head, and looks to the one side and to the other, so much with the piteous aspect of that animal, that one would not be sorry to see the ambitious imitator calipashed in his robe, and served up for the entertainment of the gallery.—

There is no hint for this mummery in the play : whatever there may be of dishonour in Falstaff's conduct, he neither does nor says any thing on this occasion which indicates terror or disorder of mind ; on the contrary, this very act is a proof of his having all his wits about him, and is a stratagème, such as it is, not improper for a buffoon, whose fate would be singularly hard, if he should not be allowed to avail himself of his character when it might serve him in most stead. We must remember, in extenuation, that the executive, the destroying, hand of Douglas was over him : “ *It was time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid him scot and lot too.*” He had but one choice : he was obliged to pass through the ceremony of dying either in jest or in earnest ; and we shall not be surprised at the event, when we remember his propensities to the former. —Life, (and especially the life of Falstaff,) might be a jest ; but he could see no joke whatever in dying : to be chop-fallen was,

with him, to lose both life and character together : he saw the point of honour, as well as every thing else, in ridiculous lights, and began to renounce its tyranny.

But I am too much in advance, and must retreat for more advantage. I should not forget how much opinion is against me, and that I am to make my way by the mere force and weight of evidence ; without which, I must not hope to possess myself of the reader : no address, no insinuation, will avail. To this evidence, then, I now resort. The courage of Falstaff is my theme, and no passage will I spare, from which any thing can be inferred as relative to this point. It would be as vain as injudicious to attempt concealment : how could I escape detection ? The play is in every one's memory, and a single passage remembered in detection would tell, in the mind of the partial observer, for fifty times its real weight. Indeed, this argument would be void of all excuse if it declined

any difficulty ; if it did not meet, if it did not challenge, opposition. Every passage then shall be produced from which, in my opinion, any inference, favourable or unfavourable, has or can be drawn ;—but not methodically, not formally, as texts for comment, but as chance or convenience shall lead the way ; but in what shape soever, they shall be always distinguishingly marked for notice. And so, with that attention to truth and candour which ought to accompany even our lightest amusements, I proceed to offer such proof as the case will admit, that *courage* is a part of Falstaff's character, that it belonged to his constitution, and was manifest in the conduct and practice of his whole life.

Let us then examine, as a source of very authentic information, what impressions Sir John Falstaff had made on the characters of the drama ; and in what estimation he is supposed to stand, with mankind in general, as to the point of personal courage.

But the quotations we make for this or other purposes, must, it is confessed, be lightly touched, and no particular passage strongly relied on, either in his favour or against him. Every thing which he himself says, or is said of him, is so phantastically discoloured by humour, or folly, or jest, that we must for the most part look to the spirit rather than the letter of what is uttered, and rely at last only on a combination of the whole.

We will begin then, if the reader please, by inquiring what impression the very vulgar had taken of Falstaff. If it is not that of cowardice, be it what else it may, that of a man of violence, or *a ruffian in years*, as Harry calls him, or any thing else, it answers my purpose, how insignificant soever the characters or incidents to be first produced may otherwise appear;—for these impressions must have been taken either from personal knowledge and observation; or, what will do better for my purpose, from

common fame. Although, I must admit, some part of this evidence will appear so weak and trifling, that it certainly ought not to be produced but in proof of *impression* only.

The Hostess Quickly employs two officers to arrest Falstaff: on the mention of his name, one of them immediately observes, "*that it may chance to cost some of them their lives, for that he will stab.*"—" *Alas a day!*" says the hostess, "*take heed of him, he cares not what mischief he doth; if his weapon be out, he will foin like any devil; he will spare neither man, woman, nor child.*" Accordingly, we find that, when they lay hold on him, he resists to the utmost of his power, and calls upon Bardolph, whose arms are at liberty, to draw. "*Away, varlets; draw, Bardolph; cut me off the villain's head, throw the quean in the kennel.*" The officers cry, *a rescue, a rescue!* But the Chief Justice comes in, and the scuffle ceases. In another scene, his

wench, Doll Tearsheet, asks him, "*when he will leave fighting, \* \* \* \* \* and patch up his old body for heaven.*" This is occasioned by his drawing his rapier, on great provocation, and driving Pistol, who is drawn likewise, down stairs, and hurting him in the shoulder. To drive Pistol was no great feat, nor do I mention it as such ; but upon this occasion it was necessary. "*A rascal bragging slave,*" says he, "*the rogue fled from me like quicksilver.*" Expressions, which, as they remember the cowardice of Pistol, seem to prove that Falstaff did not value himself on the adventure. Even something may be drawn from Davy, Shallow's serving-man, who calls Falstaff, in ignorant admiration, the *man of war*. I must observe here, and I beg the reader will notice it, that there is not a single expression dropped by these people, or either of Falstaff's followers, from which may be inferred the least suspicion of cowardice in his character ; and this is, I think, such an

*implied negation* as deserves considerable weight.

But to go a little higher, if, indeed, to consider Shallow's opinion be to go *higher*: it is from him, however, that we get the earliest account of Falstaff. He *remembers him a page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk*: "*He broke,*" says he, "*Schoggan's head at the court-gate, when he was but a crack, thus high.*" Shallow, throughout, considers him as a great leader and soldier, and relates this fact as an early indication only of his future prowess. Shallow, it is true, is a very ridiculous character; but he picked up these impressions somewhere; and he picked up none of a contrary tendency.—I want at present only to prove that Falstaff stood well in the report of common fame as to this point; and he was now near seventy years of age, and had passed in a military line through the active part of his life. At this period, common fame may be well considered as the *seal* of



his character ; a seal which ought not perhaps to be broken open, on the evidence of any future transaction.

But to proceed. Lord Bardolph was a man of the world, and of sense and observation. He informs Northumberland, erroneously indeed, that Percy had beaten the King at Shrewsbury. "*The King*," according to him, "*was wounded ; the Prince of Wales and the two Blunts slain ; certain nobles*," whom he names, "*had escaped by flight ; and the brawn, Sir John Falstaff, was taken prisoner*." But how came Falstaff into this list ? Common fame had put him there. He is singularly obliged to common fame.—But if he had not been a soldier of repute, if he had not been brave as well as fat, if he had been *mere brawn*, it would have been more germane to the matter if this lord had put him down among the baggage or the provender. The fact seems to be, that there is a real consequence about Sir John Falstaff, which is not brought for-

ward: we see him only in his familiar hours; we enter the tavern with Hal and Poins; we join in the laugh, and *take a pride to gird at him*: but there may be a great deal of truth in what he himself writes to the Prince, that, though he be "*Jack Falstaff with his familiars, he is Sir John with the rest of Europe.*" It has been remarked, and very truly I believe, that no man is a hero in the eye of his valet-de-chambre; and *thus* it is, we are witnesses only of Falstaff's weakness and buffoonery; our acquaintance is with *Jack Falstaff*, *Plump Jack*, and *Sir John Paunch*; but if we would look for Sir John Falstaff, we must put on, as Bunyan would have expressed it, the spectacles of observation. With respect, for instance, to his military command at Shrewsbury, nothing appears on the surface but the Prince's familiarly saying, in the tone usually assumed when speaking of Falstaff, "*I will procure this fat rogue a charge of foot*;" and in another

place, “*I will procure thee, Jack, a charge of foot; meet me to-morrow in the Temple Hall.*” Indeed, we might venture to infer from this, that a Prince of so great ability, whose wildness was only external and assumed, would not have procured, in so nice and critical a conjuncture, a charge of foot for a known coward. But there was more, it seems, in the case: we now find from this report, to which Lord Bardolph had given full credit, that the world had its eye upon Falstaff as an officer of merit, whom it expected to find in the field, and whose fate in the battle was an object of public concern: his life was, it seems, very material indeed; a thread of so much dependence, that *fiction*, weaving the fates of Princes, did not think it unworthy, how coarse soever, of being made part of the tissue.

We shall next produce the evidence of the Chief Justice of England. He inquires of his attendant, “*if the man who was then passing him was Falstaff; he who was in*

*question for the robbery."* The attendant answers affirmatively, but reminds his lord "*that he had since done good service at Shrewsbury ;*" and the Chief Justice, on this occasion, rating him for his debaucheries, tells him "*that his day's service at Shrewsbury had gilded over his night's exploit at Gads Hill.*" This is surely more than common fame : the Chief Justice must have known his whole character taken together, and must have received the most authentic information, and in the truest colours, of his behaviour in that action.

But, perhaps, after all, the military men may be esteemed the best judges in points of this nature. Let us hear, then, Coleville of the dale, a soldier, in degree a knight, a famous rebel, and "*whose betters, had they been ruled by him, would have sold themselves dearer :*" a man who is of consequence enough to be guarded by Blunt and *led to present execution.* This man yields himself up even to the very name and reputation

of Falstaff. "*I think,*" says he, "*you are Sir John Falstaff, and, in that thought, yield me.*" But this is but one only among the men of the sword; they shall be produced then by *dozens*, if that will satisfy. Upon the return of the King and Prince Henry from Wales, the Prince seeks out and finds Falstaff debauching in a tavern; where Peto presently brings an account of ill news from the North; and adds, "*that as he came along he met or overtook a dozen Captains, bare headed, sweating, knocking at the taverns, and asking every one for Sir John Falstaff.*" He is followed by Bardolph, who informs Falstaff, that "*he must away to the Court immediately; a dozen Captains stay at door for him.*" Here is military evidence in abundance, and *Court evidence* too; for what are we to infer from Falstaff's being sent for to Court on this ill news, but that his opinion was to be asked, as a military man of skill and experience, concerning the defences necessary to be taken.

Nor is Shakespeare content, here, with leaving us to gather up Falstaff's *better character* from inference and deduction: he comments on the fact by making Falstaff observe, that "*Men of merit are sought after: the undeserver may sleep when the man of action is called on.*" I do not wish to draw Falstaff's character out of his own mouth; but this observation refers to the fact, and is founded in reason. Nor ought we to reject, what in another place he says to the Chief Justice, as it is in the nature of an appeal to his knowledge. "*There is not a dangerous action,*" says he, "*can peep out his head, but I am thrust upon it.*" The Chief Justice seems, by his answer, to admit the fact: "*Well, be honest, be honest, and heaven bless your expedition.*" But the whole passage may deserve transcribing.

"Ch. Just. *Well, the King has severed you and Prince Henry. I hear you are going with Lord John of Lancaster,*

*against the Archbishop and the Earl of Northumberland.*

*“ Fals. Yes, I thank your pretty sweet wit for it; but look you, pray, all you that kiss my lady peace at home, that our armies join not in a hot day; for I take but two shirts out with me, and I mean not to sweat extraordinarily: if it be a hot day, if I brandish any thing but a bottle, would I might never spit white again. There is not a dangerous action can peep out his head, but I am thrust upon it. Well, I cannot last for ever.—But it was always the trick of our English nation, if they have a good thing, to make it too common. If you will needs say I am an old man, you should give me rest: I would to God my name were not so terrible to the enemy as it is. I were better to be eaten to death with a rust, than to be scoured to nothing with perpetual motion.*

*“ Ch. Just. Well, be honest, be honest, and heaven bless your expedition.”*

Falstaff indulges himself here in humour-

ous exaggeration ;—these passages are not meant to be taken, nor are we to suppose that they were taken, literally ;—but if there was not a ground of truth, if Falstaff had not had such a degree of military reputation as was capable of being thus humorously amplified and exaggerated, the whole dialogue would have been highly preposterous and absurd, and the acquiescing answer of the Lord Chief Justice singularly improper. —But, upon the supposition of Falstaff's being considered, upon the whole, as a good and gallant officer, the answer is just, and corresponds with the acknowledgment which had a little before been made, “ *that his day's service at Shrewsbury had gilded over his night's exploit at Gads Hill.*—*You may thank the unquiet time,* says the Chief Justice, *for your quiet o'erposting of that action ;*” agreeing with what Falstaff says in another place ;—“ *Well, God be thanked for these rebels, they offend none but the virtuous ; I laud them, I praise them.*”—Whether



this be said in the true spirit of a soldier or not, I do not determine; it is surely not in that of a mere coward and poltroon.

It will be needless to shew, which might be done from a variety of particulars, that Falstaff was known, and had consideration at Court. Shallow cultivates him in the idea, that *a friend at Court is better than a penny in purse*: Westmorland speaks to him in the tone of an equal: upon Falstaff's telling him, that he thought his lordship had been already at Shrewsbury, Westmorland replies,—“*Faith, Sir John, 'tis more than time that I were there, and you too; the King, I can tell you, looks for us all; we must away all to night.*”—“*Tut,*” says Falstaff, “*never fear me, I am as vigilant as a cat to steal cream.*”—He desires, in another place, of my Lord John of Lancaster, “*that, when he goes to Court, he may stand in his good report.*” His intercourse and correspondence with both these lords seem easy and familiar. “*Go,*” says he to the page,

“*bear this to my Lord of Lancaster, this to the Prince, this to the Earl of Westmorland, and this* (for he extended himself on all sides) *to old Mrs. Ursula,*” whom, it seems, the rogue ought to have married many years before.—But these intimations are needless: we see him ourselves in the *royal-presence*; where, certainly, his buffooneries never brought him; nor was the Prince of a character to commit so high an indecorum, as to thrust, upon a solemn occasion, a mere tavern companion into his father’s presence, especially in a moment when he himself deserts his looser character, and takes up that of a *prince indeed*.—In a very important scene, where Worcester is expected with proposals from Percy, and wherein he is received, is treated with, and carries back offers of accommodation from the King, the King’s attendants upon the occasion are the Prince of Wales, Lord John of Lancaster, the Earl of Westmorland, Sir Walter Blunt, and Sir John Falstaff.—What shall

be said to this ? Falstaff is not surely introduced here in vicious indulgence to a mob audience ;—he utters but one word, a buffoon one indeed, but aside and to the Prince only. Nothing, it should seem, is wanting, if decorum would here have permitted, but that he should have spoken one sober sentence in the Presence (which yet we are to suppose him ready and able to do if occasion should have required ; or his wit was given him to little purpose) and Sir John Falstaff might be allowed to pass for an established courtier and counsellor of state. “ *If I do grow great,*” says he, “ *I’ll grow less, purge and leave sack, and live as a nobleman should do.*” Nobility did not then appear to him at an unmeasurable distance ; it was, it seems, in his idea, the very next link in the chain.

But to return. I would now demand what could bring Falstaff into the royal presence, upon such an occasion, or justify the Prince’s so public acknowledgment of

him, but an established fame and reputation of military merit? In short, just the like merit as brought Sir Walter Blunt into the same circumstances of honour.

But it may be objected that his introduction into this scene is a piece of indecorum in the author. But upon what ground are we to suppose this? Upon the ground of his being a notorious coward? Why, this is the very point in question, and cannot be granted: even the direct contrary I have affirmed, and am endeavouring to support. But if it be supposed upon any other ground, it does not concern me; I have nothing to do with Shakespeare's indecorums in general. That there are indecorums in the play, I have no doubt: the indecent treatment of Percy's dead body is the greatest;—the familiarity of the insignificant, rude, and even ill-disposed, Poins with the Prince, is another;—but the admission of Falstaff into the royal presence (supposing, which I have a right to suppose, that his military charac-

ter was unimpeached) does not seem to be in any respect among the number. In camps, there is but one virtue and one vice; military merit swallows up or covers all. But, after all, what have we to do with indecorums? Indecorums respect the propriety or impropriety of exhibiting certain actions;—not their *truth* or *falsehood*, when exhibited. Shakespeare stands to us in the place of *truth* and *nature*: if we desert this principle, we cut the turf from under us; I may then object to the robbery and other passages, as indecorums, and as contrary to the truth of character. In short, we may rend and tear the play to pieces, and every man carry off what sentences he likes best.—But why this inveterate malice against poor Falstaff? He has faults enough, in conscience, without loading him with the infamy of cowardice; a charge, which, if true, would, if I am not greatly mistaken, spoil all our mirth.—But of that hereafter.

It seems to me that, in our hasty judge-

ment of some particular transactions, we forget the circumstances and condition of his whole life and character, which yet deserve our very particular attention. The author, it is true, has thrown the most advantageous of these circumstances into the *back ground*, as it were, and has brought nothing *out of the canvas* but his follies and buffoonery. We discover, however, that in a very early period of his life he was familiar with John of Gaunt; which could hardly be, unless he had possessed much personal gallantry and accomplishment, and had derived his birth from a distinguished, at least, if not from a noble, family.

It may seem very extravagant to insist upon Falstaff's birth as a ground from which, by any inference, personal courage may be derived, especially after having acknowledged that he seemed to have deserted those points of honour, which are more peculiarly the accompaniments of rank. But it may be observed that, in the feudal

ages, rank and wealth were not only connected with the point of honour, but with personal strength and natural courage. It is observable that courage is a quality, which is at least as transmissible to one's posterity as features and complexion. In these periods, men acquired and maintained their rank and possessions by personal prowess and gallantry; and their marriage alliances were made, of course, in families of the same character: and from hence, and from the exercises of their youth, we must account for the distinguished force and bravery of our antient Barons. It is not therefore beside my purpose to inquire what hints of the origin and birth of Falstaff, Shakespeare may have dropped in different parts of the play; for, though we may be disposed to allow that Falstaff in his old age might, under particular influences, desert the point of honour, we cannot give up that unalienable possession of courage, which might have been derived

to him from a noble or distinguished stock.

But it may be said, that Falstaff was in truth the child of invention only, and that a reference to the feudal accidents of birth serves only to confound fiction with reality : not altogether so. If the ideas of *courage* and *birth* were strongly associated, in the days of Shakespeare, then would the assignment of high birth to Falstaff carry, and be intended to carry, along with it to the minds of the audience, the associated idea of courage, if nothing should be specially interposed to dissolve the connection ;—and the question is as concerning this intention, and this effect.

I shall proceed yet farther to make a few very minute observations of the same nature : but, if Shakespeare meant sometimes rather to *impress* than explain, no circumstances calculated to this end, either directly or by association, are too minute for notice. But, however this may be, a more conciliating reason still remains : the argu-



ment itself, like the tales of our novelists, is a *vehicle* only; *theirs*, as they profess, of moral instruction; and *mine*, of critical amusement. The vindication of Falstaff's courage deserves not, for its own sake, the least sober discussion; Falstaff is the word only, Shakespeare is the *theme*: and if, through this channel, I can furnish no irrational amusement, the reader will not, perhaps, every where expect from me the strict severity of logical investigation.

Falstaff, then, it may be observed, was introduced into the world,—(at least we are told so) by the name of Oldcastle\*. This

\* I believe the stage was in possession of some rude outline of Falstaff before the time of Shakespeare, under the name of Sir John Oldcastle; and I think it probable that this name was retained for a period in Shakespeare's Henry IV. but changed to Falstaff before the play was printed. The expression of "*Old Lad of the Castle*," used by the Prince, does not however decidedly prove this; as it might have been only some known and familiar appellation, too carelessly transferred from the old play.

was assigning him an origin of nobility ; but the family of that name disclaiming any kindred with his vices, he was thereupon, as it is said, ingrafted into another stock\* scarcely less distinguished, though fallen into indelible disgraces ; and by this means he has been made, if the conjectures of certain critics are well founded, the dramatic successor, though, having respect to chronology, the natural *proavus*, of another Sir John, who was no less than a knight of the most noble order of the Garter ; but a name for ever dishonoured by a frequent exposure in that drum-and-trumpet thing called *The*

\* I doubt if Shakespeare had Sir John Fastolfe in his memory, when he called the character under consideration, “Falstaff.” The title and name of Sir John were transferred from Oldcastle, not Fastolfe, and there is no kind of similarity in the characters. If he had Fastolfe in his thought at all, it was, that, while he approached the name, he might make such a departure from it as the difference of character seemed to require.

*first part of Henry VI.* written doubtless, or rather exhibited, long before Shakespeare was born\*, though afterwards re-

\* It would be no difficult matter, I think, to prove that all those plays taken from the English chronicle, which are ascribed to Shakespeare, were on the stage before his time, and that he was employed by the players only to refit and repair; taking due care to retain the names of the characters and to preserve all those incidents which were the most popular. Some of these plays, particularly the two parts of Henry IV. have certainly received what may be called a *thorough repair*; that is, Shakespeare new-wrote them to the old names. In the latter part of Henry V. some of the old materials remain; and in the play which I have here censured (Henry VI.) we see very little of the new. I should conceive it would not be very difficult to feel one's way through these plays, and distinguish every where the metal from the clay. Of the two plays of Henry IV. there has been, I have admitted, a complete transmutation, preserving the old forms; but in the others, there is often no union or coalescence of parts, nor are any of them equal in merit to those plays more peculiarly and emphatically *Shakespeare's own*. The reader will be pleased to think that I do not reckon into the works of Shakespeare certain

paired, I think, and furbished up by him with here and there a little sentiment and diction. This family, if any branch of it remained in Shakespeare's time, might have been proud of their dramatic ally, if indeed they could have any fair pretence to claim as such *him* whom Shakespeare; perhaps in contempt of cowardice, wrote *Falstaff*, not

absurd productions which his editors have been so good as to compliment him with. I object, and strenuously too, even to "The Taming of the Shrew;" not that it wants merit, but that it does not bear the peculiar features and stamp of Shakespeare.

The rhyming parts of the historic plays are all, I think, of an older date than the times of Shakespeare. —There was a play, I believe, of *the Acts of King John*, of which the bastard Falconbridge seems to have been the hero and the fool: he appears to have spoken altogether in rhyme. Shakespeare shews him to us in the latter part of the second scene in the first act of *King John*, in this condition; though he afterwards, in the course of the play, thought fit to adopt him, to give him language and manners, and to make him his own.

*Fastolfe*, the true historic name of the gartered craven.

In the age of Henry IV. a family crest and arms were authentic proofs of gentility; and this proof, among others, Shakespeare has furnished us with : Falstaff always carried about him, it seems, *a seal-ring of his grandfather's, worth, as he says, forty marks*: the Prince indeed affirms, but not seriously I think, that this ring was *copper*. As to the existence of the *bonds*, which were I suppose the negotiable securities or paper-money of the time, and which he pretended to have lost, I have nothing to say ; but the ring, I believe, was really gold ; though probably a little too much alloyed with baser metal. But this is not the point : the *arms* were doubtless genuine ; they were borne by his grandfather, and are proofs of an antient gentility ; a gentility doubtless, in former periods, connected with wealth and possessions, though the gold of the family might have been transmuting by de-

grees, and perhaps, in the hands of Falstaff, converted into little better than copper. This observation is made on the supposition of Falstaff being considered as the head of the family, which I think however he ought not to be. It appears rather as if he ought to be taken in the light of a cadet or younger brother ; which the familiar appellation of *John*, “ the only one (as he says) given him by his brothers and sisters,” seems to indicate. Be this as it may, we find he is able, in spite of dissipation, to keep up a certain *state* and *dignity* of appearance ; retaining no less than four, if not five, followers or men servants in his train. He appears also to have had apartments in town, and, by his invitations of Master Gower to dinner and to supper, a regular table : and one may infer, farther, from the Prince’s question, on his return from Wales, to Bardolph, “ *Is your master here in London?*” that he had likewise a house in the country. Slight proofs, it must be confessed ; yet the

inferences are so probable, so buoyant, in their own nature, that they may well rest on them. That he did not lodge at the tavern is clear from the circumstances of the arrest. These various occasions of expense, —servants, taverns, houses, and whores,—necessarily imply that Falstaff must have had some funds which are not brought immediately under our notice. That these funds were not however adequate to his style of living, is plain : perhaps his train may be considered only as incumbrances, which the pride of family and the habit of former opulence might have brought upon his present poverty : I do not mean absolute poverty, but call it so as relative to his expense. To have “*but seven groats and two-pence in his purse,*” and a page to bear it, is truly ridiculous ; and it is for that reason we become so familiar with its contents. “*He can find,*” he says, “*no remedy for this consumption of the purse, borrowing does but linger and linger it out ; but the*

*disease is incurable.*" It might well be deemed so in his course of dissipation: but I shall presently suggest one source at least of his supply, much more constant and honourable than that of borrowing. But the condition of Falstaff, as to opulence or poverty, is not very material to my purpose: it is enough if his birth was distinguished, and his youth noted for gallantry and accomplishments. To the first I have spoken, and as for the latter, we shall not be at a loss when we remember that "*he was, in his youth, a page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk;*" a situation at that time sought for by young men of the best families and first fortune. The house of every great noble was, at that period, a kind of military school; and it is probable that Falstaff was singularly adroit at his exercises: "*He broke Schoggan's head,*" (some boisterous fencer I suppose) "*when he was but a crack, thus high.*" Shallow remembers him *as notedly skilful at back-sword;* and



he was at that period, according to his own humorous account, "*scarcely an eagle's talon in the waist, and could have crept through an alderman's thumb ring.*" Even at the age at which he is exhibited to us, we find him *foundering*, as he calls it, *nine score and odd miles*, with wonderful expedition, to join the army of Prince John of Lancaster ; and declaring, after the surrender of Coleville, that "*had he but a belly of any indifferency, he were simply the most active fellow in Europe.*" Nor ought we here to pass over his knighthood without notice. It was, I grant, intended by the author as a dignity, which, like his courage and his wit, was to be debased ; his knighthood by low situations, his courage by circumstances and imputations of cowardice, and his wit by buffoonery. But how are we to suppose this honour was acquired ? By that very courage, it should seem, which we so obstinately deny him. It was not certainly given him, like a modern city

knighthood, for his wealth or gravity: it was in these days a military honour, and an authentic badge of military merit.

But Falstaff was not only a military knight, he possessed an honourable *pension* into the bargain; the reward as well as retainer of service, and which seems (besides the favours perhaps of Mrs. Ursula) to be the principal and only solid support of his present expenses. But let us refer to the passage. "*A pox of this gout, or a gout of this pox; for one or the other plays the rogue with my great toe: it is no matter if I do halt, I have the wars for my colour, and my pension shall seem the more reasonable.*" The mention Falstaff here makes of a pension, has, I believe, been generally construed to refer rather to *hope* than *possession*, yet I know not why: for the possessive *MY, my pension*, (not *a pension*,) requires a different construction. Is it that we cannot enjoy a wit, till we have stript him of every worldly advantage, and reduced him

below the level of our envy? It may be, perhaps, for this reason, among others, that Shakespeare has so obscured the better parts of Falstaff, and stolen them secretly on our feelings, instead of opening them fairly to the notice of our understandings. How carelessly, and through what bye-paths, as it were, of casual inference, is this fact of a pension introduced! And how has he associated it with misfortune and infirmity! Yet I question, however, if, in this one place, the *impression* which was intended be well and effectually made. It must be left to the reader to determine, if, in that mass of things out of which Falstaff is compounded, he ever considered a pension as any part of the composition: a pension however he appears to have had, one that halting could only seem to make more reasonable, not more honourable. The inference arising from the fact, I shall leave to the reader. It is surely a circumstance highly advantageous to Falstaff, (I speak

of the pensions of former days,) whether he be considered in the light of a soldier or a gentleman.

I cannot foresee the temper of the reader, nor whether he be content to go along with me in these kinds of observations. Some of the incidents which I have drawn out of the play may appear too minute, whilst yet they refer to principles which may seem too general. Many points require explanation; something should be said of the nature of Shakespeare's dramatic characters\*; by what arts they were formed, and

\* The reader must be sensible of something in the composition of Shakespeare's characters, which renders them essentially different from those drawn by other writers. The characters of every drama must indeed be grouped; but, in the groupes of other poets, the parts which are not seen, do not in fact exist. But there is a certain roundness and integrity in the forms of Shakespeare, which give them an independence as well as a relation, insomuch that we often meet with passages, which, though perfectly felt, cannot be sufficiently explained in words, without unfolding the

wherein they differ from those of other writers ; something likewise more professedly of Shakespeare himself, and of the peculiar character of his genius. After such a re-

whole character of the speaker : and this I may be obliged to do in respect to that of Lancaster, in order to account for some words spoken by him in censure of Falstaff.—Something, which may be thought too heavy for the text, I shall add here, as a conjecture concerning the composition of Shakespeare's characters : not that they were the effect, I believe, so much of a minute and laborious attention, as of a certain comprehensive energy of mind, involving within itself all the effects of system and of labour.

Bodies of all kinds, whether of metals, plants, or animals, are supposed to possess certain first principles of *being*, and to have an existence independent of the accidents which form their magnitude or growth : those accidents are supposed to be drawn in from the surrounding elements, but not indiscriminately ; each plant and each animal imbibes those things only, which are proper to its own distinct nature, and which have besides such a secret relation to each other as to be capable of forming a perfect union and coalescence : but so variously are the surrounding elements mingled

view, we may not perhaps think any consideration arising out of the play, or out of general nature, either as too minute or too extensive.

and disposed, that each particular body, even of those under the same species, has yet some *peculiar* of its own. Shakespeare appears to have considered the being and growth of the human mind as analogous to this system : there are certain qualities and capacities, which he seems to have considered as first principles ; the chief of which are certain energies of courage and activity, according to their degrees ; together with different degrees and sorts of sensibilities, and a capacity, varying likewise in the degree, of discernment and intelligence. The rest of the composition is drawn in from an atmosphere of surrounding things ; that is, from the various influences of the different laws, religions, and governments, in the world ; and from those of the different ranks and inequalities in society ; and from the different professions of men, encouraging or repressing passions of particular sorts, and inducing different modes of thinking and habits of life : and he seems to have known, intuitively, what those influences in particular were which this or that original constitution would most freely imbibe, and which would most

Shakespeare is, in truth, an author whose mimic creation agrees in general so perfectly with that of nature, that it is not only wonderful in the great, but opens another

easily associate and coalesce. But all these things being, in different situations, very differently disposed, and those differences exactly discerned by him, he found no difficulty in marking every individual, even among characters of the same sort, with something peculiar and distinct. Climate and complexion demand their influence; "*Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee, and love thee after,*" is a sentiment characteristic of, and fit only to be uttered by, a *Moor*.

But it was not enough for Shakespeare to have formed his characters with the most perfect truth and coherence; it was farther necessary, that he should possess a wonderful facility of compressing, as it were, his own spirit into these images, and of giving alternate animation to the forms. This was not to be done *from without*; he must have *felt* every varied situation, and have spoken through the organ he had formed. Such an intuitive comprehension of things, and such a facility, must unite to-produce a Shakespeare. The reader will not now be surprised if I affirm that

scene of amazement to the discoveries of the microscope. We have been charged indeed by a foreign writer with an over-much admiring of this *barbarian* : whether

those characters in Shakespeare, which are seen only in part, are yet capable of being unfolded and understood in the whole ; every part being in fact relative, and inferring all the rest. It is true that the point of action or sentiment, which we are most concerned in, is always held out for our special notice. But who does not perceive that there is a peculiarity about it, which conveys a relish of the whole ? And very frequently, when no particular point presses, he boldly makes a character act and speak from those parts of the composition, which are *inferred*, only, and not distinctly shewn. This produces a wonderful effect ; it seems to carry us beyond the poet to nature itself, and gives an integrity and truth to facts and character, which they could not otherwise obtain : and this is in reality that art in Shakespeare, which, being withdrawn from our notice, we more emphatically call *nature*. A felt propriety and truth from causes unseen, I take to be the highest point of poetic composition. If the characters of Shakespeare are thus whole, and as it were original, while those of almost all other writers



we have admired with knowledge, or have blindly followed those feelings of affection which we could not resist, I cannot tell; but certain it is, that to the labours of his Editors he has not been over-much obliged. They are however, for the most part, of the first rank in literary fame; but some of them had possessions of their own in Parnassus, of an extent too great and important to allow of a very diligent attention to the interests of others; and among those critics more professionally so, the ablest and the best has unfortunately looked more to the praise of ingenious, than of just, conjecture. The character of his emendations are not so much that of right or wrong, as that, being in the extreme, they are always *Warburtonian*. Another has since under-

are mere imitation, it may be fit to consider them rather as historic than dramatic beings; and, when occasion requires, to account for their conduct from the *whole* of character, from general principles, from latent motives, and from policies not avowed.

taken the custody of our author, whom he seems to consider as a sort of wild Proteus or madman, and accordingly knocks him down with the butt-end of his critical staff, as often as he exceeds that line of sober discretion, which this learned Editor appears to have chalked out for him: yet is this Editor, notwithstanding, “a man, take him for all in all,” very highly respectable for his genius and his learning. What however may be chiefly complained of in these gentlemen is, that having erected themselves into the condition, as it were, of guardians and trustees of Shakespeare, they have never undertaken to discharge the disgraceful incumbrances of some wretched productions, which have long hung heavy on his fame. Besides the evidence of taste, which indeed is not communicable, there are yet other and more general proofs that these incumbrances were not incurred by Shakespeare: the Latin sentences dispersed through the im-

puted trash is, I think, of itself, a decisive one. *Love's Labour lost* contains a very conclusive one of another kind; though the very last Editor has, I believe, in his critical sagacity, suppressed the evidence, and withdrawn the record.

Yet, whatever may be the neglect of some, or the censure of others, there are those who firmly believe that this wild, this uncultivated, *barbarian* has not yet obtained one half of his fame; and who trust that some new Stagyrite will arise, who, instead of pecking at the surface of things, will enter into the inward soul of his compositions, and expel, by the force of congenial feelings, those foreign impurities which have stained and disgraced his page. And as to those *spots* which will still remain, they may perhaps become invisible to those who shall seek them through the medium of his beauties, instead of looking for those beauties, as is too frequently done, through the smoke of some real or imputed obscu-

riety. When the hand of time shall have brushed off his present Editors and Commentators, and when the very name of Voltaire, and even the memory of the language in which he has written, shall be no more, the Apalachian mountains, the banks of the Ohio, and the plains of Sciota, shall resound with the accents of this *barbarian*: in his native tongue, he shall roll the genuine passions of nature; nor shall the griefs of Lear be alleviated, or the charms and wit of Rosalind be abated, by time. There is indeed nothing perishable about him, except that very learning which he is said so much to want. He had not, it is true, enough for the demands of the age in which he lived, but he had perhaps too much for the reach of his genius, and the interest of his fame. Milton and he will carry the decayed remnants and fripperies of antient mythology into more distant ages than they are, by their own force, entitled to extend; and the metamorphoses of Ovid, upheld

by them, lay a new claim to unmerited immortality.

Shakespeare is a name so interesting, that it is excusable to stop a moment, nay it would be indecent to pass him without the tribute of some admiration. He differs essentially from all other writers : him, we may profess rather to feel than to understand ; and it is safer to say, on many occasions, that we are possessed by him, than that we possess him. And no wonder ;— he scatters the seeds of things, the principles of character and action, with so cunning a hand, yet with so careless an air ; and, master of our feelings, submits himself so little to our judgement, that every thing seems superior. We discern not his course, we see no connexion of cause and effect, we are rapt in ignorant admiration, and claim no kindred with his abilities. All the incidents, all the parts, look like chance, whilst we feel and are sensible that the whole is design. His characters not

only act and speak in strict conformity to nature, but in strict relation to us ; just so much is shewn as is requisite, just so much is impressed ; he commands every passage to our heads and to our hearts, and moulds us as he pleases, and that with so much ease, that he never betrays his own exertions. We see these characters act from the mingled motives of passion, reason, interest, habit, and complexion, in all their proportions, when they are supposed to know it not themselves ; and we are made to acknowledge that their actions and sentiments are, from those motives, the necessary result. He at once blends and distinguishes every thing ;—every thing is complicated, every thing is plain. I restrain the farther expressions of my admiration, lest they should not seem applicable to man ; but it is really astonishing that a mere human being, a part of humanity only, should so perfectly comprehend the whole ; and that he should possess such

exquisite art, that, whilst every woman and every child shall feel the whole effect, his learned Editors and Commentators should yet so very frequently mistake or seem ignorant of the cause. A sceptre or a straw are, in his hands, of equal efficacy ; he needs no selection ; he converts every thing into excellence ; nothing is too great, nothing is too base. Is a character efficient, like Richard, it is every thing we can wish : is it otherwise, like Hamlet, it is productive of equal admiration : action produces one mode of excellence, and inaction another : the Chronicle, the Novel, or the Ballad ; the king or the beggar, the hero, the madman, the sot or the fool ; it is all one ;—nothing is worse, nothing is better : the same genius pervades and is equally admirable in all. Or, is a character to be shewn in progressive change, and the events of years comprised within the hour ;—with what a magic hand does he prepare and scatter his spells ! The understanding

must, in the first place, be subdued; and, lo! how the rooted prejudices of the child spring up to confound the man! The Weird sisters rise, and order is extinguished: the laws of nature give way, and leave nothing in our minds but wildness and horror. No pause is allowed us for reflection: horrid sentiment, furious guilt and compunction, air-drawn daggers, murders, ghosts, and enchantment, shake and *possess us wholly*. In the mean time, the *process* is completed. Macbeth changes under our eye; *the milk of human kindness is converted to gall; he has supped full of horrors*, and his *May of life is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf*; whilst we, the fools of amazement, are insensible to the shifting of place and the lapse of time, and, till the curtain drops, never once wake to the truth of things, or recognize the laws of existence.

On such an occasion, a fellow, like Rymer, waking from his trance, shall lift up his



constable's staff, and charge this great magician, this daring *practiser of arts inhibited*, in the name of Aristotle, to surrender; whilst Aristotle himself, disowning his wretched officer, would fall prostrate at his feet and acknowledge his supremacy.— O supreme of dramatic excellence! (might he say,) not to me be imputed the insolence of fools. The bards of Greece were confined within the narrow circle of the Chorus, and, hence, they found themselves constrained to practise, for the most part, the precision, and copy the details, of nature. I followed them, and knew not that a larger circle might be drawn, and the Drama extended to the whole reach of human genius. Convinced, I see that a more compendious *nature* may be obtained; a nature of *effects* only, to which, neither the relations of place, nor continuity of time, are always essential. Nature, condescending to the faculties and apprehensions of man, has drawn through human life a regular chain of visible causes

and effects : but Poetry delights in surprise, conceals her steps, seizes at once upon the heart, and obtains the sublime of things, without betraying the rounds of her ascent : true Poesy is *magic*, not *nature* ; an effect from causes hidden or unknown. To the Magician, I prescribed no laws ; his law and his power are one ; his power is his law. Him, who neither imitates, nor is within the reach of imitation, no precedent can or ought to bind, no limits to contain. If his end is obtained, who shall question his course ? Means, whether apparent or hidden, are justified, in Poesy, by success ; but *then* most perfect and most admirable, when most concealed\*.—But whither am I

\* These observations have brought me so near to the regions of poetic *magic*, (using the word here in its strict and proper sense, and not loosely, as in the *text*,) that, though they lie not directly in my course, I yet may be allowed in this place to point the reader that way. A felt propriety, or truth of art, from an unseen though supposed adequate cause, we call

going? This copious and delightful topic has drawn me far beyond my design: I hasten back to my subject, and am guarded, for a time at least, against any farther temptation to digress.

*nature.* A like feeling of propriety and truth, supposed without a cause, or as seeming to be derived from causes inadequate, fantastic, and absurd,—such as, wands, circles, incantations, and so forth,—we call by the general name *magic*, including all the train of superstition, witches, ghosts, fairies, and the rest.—*Reason* is confined to the line of visible existence; our *passions* and our *fancy* extend far beyond, into the *obscure*; but, however lawless their operations may seem, the images they so wildly form have yet a relation to truth, and are the shadows at least, however fantastic, of *reality*. I am not investigating, but passing, this subject, and must therefore leave behind me much curious speculation. Of personifications, however, we should observe, that those which are made out of abstract ideas are the creatures of the understanding only: thus, of the mixed modes, virtue, beauty, wisdom, and others,—what are they but very obscure ideas of *qualities*, considered as abstracted from any *subject* whatever? The mind cannot steadily

I was considering the dignity of Falstaff so far as it might seem connected with, or productive of, military merit, and I have assigned him *reputation* at least, if not *fame*, noble connexion, birth, attendants,

contemplate such an abstraction: what then does it do?—invent or imagine a subject, in order to support these qualities; and hence we get the Nymphs or Goddesses of virtue, of beauty, or of wisdom; the very obscurity of the ideas being the cause of their conversion into sensible objects, with precision both of feature and of form. But, as reason has its personifications, so has *passion*.—Every passion has its object, though often distant and obscure;—to be brought nearer then, and rendered more distinct, it is personified; and Fancy fantastically decks or aggravates the *form*, and adds “a local habitation and a name.” But passion is the *dupe* of its own artifice, and *realises* the image it had formed. The Grecian theology was mixed of both these kinds of personification. Of the images produced by passion it must be observed, that they are the images, for the most part, not of the passions themselves, but of their remote effects. *Guilt* looks through the medium, and beholds a devil; *fear*, spectres of every sort; *hope*, a smiling

title, and an honourable pension; every one of them presumptive proofs of military merit, and motives of action. What deduction is to be made on these articles, and why they are so much obscured, may, perhaps, hereafter appear.

cherub; *malice* and *envy* see hags, and witches, and enchanters dire; whilst the innocent and the young behold, with fearful delight, the tripping fairy, whose shadowy form the moon gilds with its softest beams. —Extravagant as all this appears, it has its laws so precise that we are sensible both of a local and temporary, and of an universal, magic; the first derived from the general nature of the human mind, influenced by particular habits, institutions, and climate; and the latter from the same general nature, abstracted from those considerations. Of the first sort, the *machinery* in Macbeth is a very striking instance; a machinery, which, however exquisite at the time, has already lost more than half its force; and the Gallery now laughs, in some places, where it ought to shudder:—but the magic of the Tempest is lasting and universal.

There is, besides, a species of writing for which we have no term of art, and which holds a middle place

I have now gone through the examination of all the persons of the drama, from whose mouths any thing can be drawn relative to the courage of Falstaff, excepting the Prince and Poins, whose evidence I have begged leave to *reserve*; and, except-

between nature and magic; I mean, where fancy, either alone, or mingled with reason, or reason assuming the appearance of fancy, governs some real existence; but the whole of this art is portrayed in a single play; in the real madness of Lear, in the assumed wildness of Edgar, and in the professional fantasque of the fool, all operating to contrast and heighten each other. There is yet another feat in this kind, which Shakespeare has performed;—he has personified malice in his Caliban; a character kneaded up of three distinct natures, the diabolical, the human, and the brute. The rest of his preternatural beings are images of *effects* only, and cannot subsist but in a surrounding atmosphere of those passions from which they are derived. *Caliban* is the passion itself, or rather a compound of malice, servility, and lust, *substantiated*; and therefore best shewn in contrast with the lightness of Ariel and the innocence of Miranda.—Witches are sometimes substantial existences, supposed

ing a very severe censure passed on him by Lord John of Lancaster, which I shall presently consider. But I must first observe, that setting aside the jests of the Prince and Poins, and this censure of Lancaster, there is not one expression uttered by any

to be possessed by, or allied to, the unsubstantial; but the Witches in *Macbeth* are a gross sort of shadows, "bubbles of the earth," as they are finely called by Banquo.—Ghosts differ from other imaginary beings in this, that they belong to no element, have no specific nature or character, and are effects, however harsh the expression, supposed without a cause; the reason of which is, that they are not the creation of the poet, but the servile copies or transcripts of popular imagination, connected with supposed reality and religion. Should the poet assign the true cause, and call them the mere painting or *coinage of the brain*, he would disappoint his own end, and destroy the being he had raised. Should he assign fictitious causes, and add a specific nature and a local habitation, it would not be endured; or the effect would be lost by the conversion of one being into another. The approach to reality in this case defeats all the arts and managements of fiction. The whole play of the *Tempest* is of

character in the drama, that can be construed into any impeachment of Falstaff's courage;—an observation made before as respecting some of the witnesses;—it is now extended to all: and though this silence be a negative proof only, it cannot, in my opinion, under the circumstances of the case, and whilst uncontradicted by facts, be too much relied on. If Falstaff had been intended for the character of a *Miles Gloriosus*, his behaviour ought and therefore would have been commented upon by others. Shakespeare seldom trusts to the apprehensions of his audience; his characters interpret for one another continually, and when we least suspect such artful and secret management: the conduct of Shakespeare in this respect is admirable, and I

so high and superior a nature, that Dryden, who had attempted to imitate in vain, might well exclaim that

“—Shakespeare's *magic* could not copied be,  
Within that circle none durst walk but He.”



could point out a thousand passages which might put to shame the advocates of a formal Chorus, and prove that there is as little of necessity, as grace, in so mechanic a contrivance\*. But I confine my censure of the Chorus to its supposed use of comment and interpretation, only.

Falstaff is, indeed, so far from appearing to my eye in the light of a *Miles Gloriosus*, that, in the best of my taste and judgement, he does not discover, except in consequence of the robbery, the least *trait* of such a character. All his boasting speeches are humour, mere humour, and carefully spoken to persons who cannot misapprehend them, who cannot be imposed on: they contain indeed, for the most part, an unreasonable and imprudent ridicule of himself, the usual subject of his good humoured merriment;

\* Ænobarbus, in Antony and Cleopatra, is in effect the Chorus of the play; as Menenius Agrippa is of Coriolanus.

but in the company of ignorant people, such as the Justices, or his own followers, he is remarkably reserved, and does not hazard any thing, even in the way of humour, that may be subject to mistake: indeed, he nowhere seems to suspect that his character is open to censure on this side, or that he needs the arts of imposition.—“*Turk Gregory never did such deeds in arms as I have done this day,*” is spoken, whilst he breathes from action, to the Prince, in a tone of jolly humour, and contains nothing but a light ridicule of his own inactivity: this is as far from real boasting as his saying, before the battle, “*Would it were bed-time, Hal, and all were well,*” is from meanness or depression. This articulated wish is not the fearful outcry of a *coward*, but the frank and honest breathing of a *generous fellow*, who does not expect to be seriously reproached with the character. Instead, indeed, of deserving the name of a vain-glorious coward, his modesty perhaps on this head, and

whimsical ridicule of himself, have been a principal source of the imputation.

But to come to the very serious reproach thrown upon him by that cold-blooded boy, as he calls him, Lancaster.—Lancaster makes a solemn treaty of peace with the Archbishop of York, Mowbray, &c. upon the faith of which, they disperse their troops ; which is no sooner done than Lancaster arrests the principals, and pursues the scattered stray : a transaction, by the bye, so singularly perfidious, that I wish Shakespeare, for his own credit, had not suffered it to pass under his pen without marking it with the blackest strokes of infamy.—During this transaction, Falstaff arrives, joins in the pursuit, and takes Sir John Coleville prisoner. Upon being seen by Lancaster, he is thus addressed :—

“ Now, Falstaff, where have you been all this while ?  
When every thing is over, then you come :  
These tardy tricks of yours will, on my life,  
One time or other, break some gallows’ back.”

This may appear, to many, a very formidable passage. It is spoken, as, we may say, in the hearing of the army, and by one entitled as it were, by his station, to decide on military conduct; and if no punishment immediately follows, the forbearance may be imputed to a regard for the Prince of Wales, whose favour the delinquent was known so unworthily to possess. But this reasoning will by no means apply to the real circumstances of the case. The effect of this passage will depend on the credit we shall be inclined to give to Lancaster for integrity and candour, and still more upon the facts which are the ground of this censure, and which are fairly offered by Shakespeare to our notice.

We will examine the evidence arising from both; and, to this end, we must in the first place a little unfold the character of this young commander in chief;—from a review of which, we may more clearly discern the general impulses and secret mo-

tives of his conduct ; and this is a proceeding which I think the peculiar character of Shakespeare's Drama will very well justify.

We are already well prepared what to think of this young man :—we have just seen a very pretty manœuvre of his in a matter of the highest moment, and have therefore the less reason to be surprised if we find him practising a more petty fraud with suitable skill and address. He appears in truth to have been what Falstaff calls him, *a cold, reserved, sober-blooded boy* ; a politician, as it should seem, by nature ; bred up moreover in the school of Bolingbroke, his father, and tutored to betray : with sufficient courage and ability perhaps, but with too much of the knave in his composition, and too little of enthusiasm, ever to be a great and superior character. That such a youth as this should, even from the propensities of character alone, take any plausible occasion to injure a frank unguarded man of wit and plea-

sure, will not appear unnatural. But he had other inducements. Falstaff had given very general scandal by his distinguished wit and noted poverty, insomuch that a little cruelty and injustice towards him was likely to pass, in the eye of the grave and prudent part of mankind, as a very creditable piece of fraud, and to be accounted to Lancaster for virtue and good service. But Lancaster had motives yet more prevailing; Falstaff was a Favourite, without the power which belongs to that character; and the tone of the court was strongly against him, as the misleader and corrupter of the Prince; who was now at too great a distance to afford him immediate countenance and protection. A scratch then, between jest and earnest as it were, something that would not too much offend the prince, yet would leave behind a disgraceful scar upon Falstaff, was very suitable to the temper and situation of parties and affairs. With these observations in our thought, let us re-

turn to the passage : it is plainly intended for disgrace ; but how artful, how cautious, how insidious, is the manner ! It may pass for sheer pleasantry and humour : Lancaster assumes the familiar phrase and *girding* tone of Harry ; and the gallows, as he words it, appears to be in the most danger from an encounter with Falstaff.—With respect to the matter, it is a kind of *muching malicho* ; it means mischief indeed, but there is not precision enough in it to entitle it to the appellation of a formal charge, or to give to Falstaff any certain and determined ground of defence. *Tardy tricks* may mean, not cowardice but neglect only, though the *manner* may seem to carry the imputation to both.—The reply of Falstaff is exactly suited to the qualities of the speech ; — for Falstaff never wants ability, but conduct only. He answers the general effect of this speech, by a feeling and serious complaint of injustice ; he then goes on to apply his defence to the

vindication both of his diligence and courage; but he deserts by degrees his serious tone, and taking the handle of pleasantry, which Lancaster had held forth, to him, he is prudently content, as being sensible of Lancaster's high rank and station, to let the whole pass off in buffoonery and humour. But the question is, however, not concerning the adroitness and management of either party: our business is, after putting the credit of Lancaster out of the question, to discover what there may be of truth and of fact either in the charge of the one, or the defence of the other. From this only, we shall be able to draw our inferences with fairness and with candour. The charge against Falstaff is already in the possession of the reader: the defence follows.—

*“Fals. I would be sorry, my lord, but it should be thus: I never knew yet but that rebuke and check were the reward of valour. Do you think me a swallow, an arrow, or a*



*bullet? Have I, in my poor and old motion, the expedition of thought? I speeded hither within the very extremest inch of possibility. I have foundered ninescore and odd posts,”* (deserting, by degrees, his serious tone, for one of more address and advantage) “*and here, travel-tainted as I am, have I, in my pure and immaculate valour, taken Sir John Coleville of the Dale, a most furious knight and valorous enemy.”*

Falstaff's answer, then, is, that he used all possible expedition to join the army; the not doing of which, with an implication of cowardice as the cause, is the utmost extent of the charge against him; and to take off this implication, he refers to the evidence of a fact present and manifest,—the surrender of Coleville; in whose hearing he speaks, and to whom therefore he is supposed to appeal. Nothing then remains, but that we should inquire if Falstaff's answer was really founded in truth; “*I speeded hither,”* says he, “*within the ex-*

*tremest inch of possibility:*" if it be so, he is justified: but I am afraid, for we must not conceal any thing, that Falstaff was really detained too long by his debaucheries in London; at least, if we take the Chief Justice's word very strictly.

" Ch. Just. *How now, Sir John? What are you brawling here? Doth this become your PLACE, your TIME, your BUSINESS? You should have been well on your way to York.*"

Here, then, seems to be a delay worthy perhaps of rebuke; and if we could suppose Lancaster to mean nothing more by *tardy tricks* than idleness and debauch, I should not possibly think myself much concerned to vindicate Falstaff from the charge; but the words imply, to my apprehension, a designed and deliberate avoidance of danger. Yet, to the contrary of this, we are furnished with very full and complete evidence. Falstaff, the moment he quits London, discovers the utmost

eagerness and impatience to join the army; he gives up his gluttony, his mirth, and his ease. We see him take up in his passage some recruits at Shallow's house; and though he has pecuniary views upon Shallow, no inducement stops him; he takes no refreshment, he cannot tarry dinner, he hurries off; "I will not," says he to the Justices, "use many words with you. Fare ye well, gentlemen, both; I thank ye, I must a dozen miles to-night."—He misuses, it is true, at this time, the *King's press* *damnably*; but that does not concern me, at least not for the present; it belongs to other parts of his character.—It appears then manifestly that Shakespeare meant to shew Falstaff as really using the utmost speed in his power; he arrives almost literally *within the extremest inch of possibility*; and if Lancaster had not accelerated the event by a stroke of perfidy, much more subject to the imputation of cowardice than the *debauch* of Falstaff, he would have

been time enough to have shared in the danger of a fair and honest decision. But great men have, it seems, a privilege ; “ *that in the General’s but a choleric word, which in the Soldier were flat blasphemy.*” Yet, after all, Falstaff did really come time enough, as it appears, to join in the villainous triumphs of the day ; to take prisoner *Coleville of the Dale, a most furious knight and valorous enemy.*—Let us look to the fact. If this incident should be found to contain any striking proof of Falstaff’s courage and military fame, his defence against Lancaster will be stronger than the reader has even a right to demand. Falstaff encounters Coleville in the field, and, having demanded his name, is ready to assail him ; but Coleville asks him if he is not Sir John Falstaff ; thereby implying a purpose of surrender. Falstaff will not so much as furnish him with a pretence, and answers only, that *he is as good a man.* “ *Do you yield, sir, or shall I sweat for you ?*”—“ *I*

*think,"* says Coleville, "*you are Sir John Falstaff, and, in that thought, yield me.*" This fact, and the incidents with which it is accompanied, speak loudly ; it seems to have been contrived by the author on purpose to take off a rebuke so authoritatively made by Lancaster. The fact is set before our eyes to confute the censure : Lancaster himself seems to give up his charge, though not his ill will ; for, upon Falstaff asking leave to pass through Gloucestershire, and artfully desiring that, upon Lancaster's return to Court, *he might stand well in his report*, Lancaster seems, in his answer, to mingle malice and acquittal. "*Fare ye well, Falstaff, I in my condition shall better speak of you than you deserve.*"—" *I would,*" says Falstaff, who is left behind in the scene, "*you had but the wit ; 'twere better than your dukedom.*" He continues on the stage some time, chewing the cud of dishonour, which, with all his facility, he cannot well swallow. "*Good*

*faith*," says he, accounting to himself as well as he could for the injurious conduct of Lancaster; "*this sober-blooded boy does not love me.*" This he might well believe. "*A man,*" says he, "*cannot make him laugh; there's none of these demure boys come to any proof; but that's no marvel, they drink no sack.*"—Falstaff then, it seems, knew no drinker of sack who was a coward; at least the instance was not home and familiar to him.—"*They all,*" says he, "*fall into a kind of male green sickness, and are generally fools and cowards.*" Anger has a privilege, and I think Falstaff has a right to turn the tables upon Lancaster, if he can: but Lancaster was certainly no fool, and I think, upon the whole, no coward; yet the male green sickness, which Falstaff talks of, seems to have infected his manners and aspect, and taken from him all external indication of gallantry and courage. He behaves, in the battle of Shrewsbury, beyond the promise of his

complexion and deportment : “ *By heaven, thou hast deceived me, Lancaster,*” says Harry, “ *I did not think thee Lord of such a spirit !*” Nor was his father less surprised “ *at his holding Lord Percy at the point with lustier maintenance than he did look for from such an unripe warrior.*” But how well and unexpectedly soever he might have behaved on that occasion, he does not seem to have been of a temper to trust fortune too much or too often with his safety ; therefore it is that, in order to keep the event in his own hands, he loads the die, in the present case, with villainy and deceit : the event, however, he piously ascribes, like a wise and prudent youth as he is, without paying that worship to himself which he so justly merits, to the special favour and interposition of heaven.

“ Strike up your drums, pursue the scatter’d stray :  
Heaven, and not we, have safely fought to-day.”

But the profane Falstaff, on the contrary,

less informed and less studious of supernatural things, imputes the whole of this conduct to thin potations, and the not drinking largely of good and excellent *sherris*; and so little doubt does he seem to entertain of the cowardice and ill disposition of this youth, that he stands devising causes, and casting about for an hypothesis on which the whole may be physically explained and accounted for;—but I shall leave him and Doctor Cadogan to settle that point as they may.

The only serious charge against Falstaff's courage we have now at large examined; it came from great authority, from the Commander in chief, and was meant as chastisement and rebuke; but it appears to have been founded in ill-will, in the particular character of Lancaster, and in the wantonness and insolence of power; and the author has placed near, and under our notice, full and ample proofs of its injustice. —And thus, the deeper we look unto Fal-



staff's character, the stronger is our conviction that he was not intended to be shewn as a constitutional coward: censure cannot lay sufficient hold on him,—and even malice turns away, and more than half pronounces his acquittal.

But, as yet, we have dealt principally in parole and circumstantial evidence, and have referred to *fact* only incidentally. But *facts* have a much more operative influence: they may be produced, not as arguments only, but records; not to dispute alone, but to decide.—It is time then to behold Falstaff in actual service as a soldier, in danger, and in battle. We have already displayed one fact in his defence against the censure of Lancaster; a fact extremely unequivocal and decisive. But the reader knows I have others, and doubtless goes before me to the action at Shrewsbury. In the midst and in the heat of battle, we see him come forwards;—what are his words? “*I have led my rag-o-muffians where they are*

*peppered ; there's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive."* But to *whom* does he say this? To himself only; he speaks *in soliloquy*. There is no questioning the fact, *he had led them ; they were peppered ; there were not three left alive*. He was in luck, being in bulk equal to any two of them, to escape unhurt. Let the author answer for that, I have nothing to do with it: he was the poetic maker of the whole *corps*, and he might dispose of them as he pleased. Well might the Chief Justice, as we now find, acknowledge Falstaff's services in this day's battle; an acknowledgment, which amply confirms the fact. A modern officer, who had performed a feat of this kind, would expect, not only the praise of having done his duty, but the appellation of a hero. But poor Falstaff has too much wit, to thrive: in spite of probability, in spite of inference, in spite of fact, he must be a coward still. He happens unfortunately to have more wit than courage, and therefore we are malici-

ously determined that he shall have no courage at all. But let us suppose that his modes of expression, even *in soliloquy*, will admit of some abatement;—how much shall we abate? Say that he brought off *fifty* instead of *three*; yet a modern captain would be apt to look big after an action with two-thirds of his men, as it were, in his belly. Surely Shakespeare never meant to exhibit this man as a constitutional coward; if he did, his means were sadly destructive of his end. We see him, after he had expended his rag-o-muffians, with sword and target in the midst of battle, in perfect possession of himself, and replete with humour and jocularly. He was, I presume, in some immediate personal danger, in danger also of a general defeat; too corpulent for flight; and to be led a prisoner, was probably to be led to execution; yet we see him laughing and easy, offering a bottle of sack to the Prince, instead of a pistol, punning, and telling him, “there was

that which would sack a city.—"What, is it a time," says the Prince, "to jest and dally now?" No; a sober character would not jest on such an occasion, but a coward could not; he would neither have the inclination, nor the power. And what could support Falstaff in such a situation? Not principle; he is not suspected of the point of honour; he seems, indeed, fairly to renounce it. "Honour cannot set a leg or an arm; it has no skill in surgery:—what is it? a word only; mere air. It is insensible to the dead; and detraction will not let it live with the living." What, then, but a strong natural constitutional courage, which nothing could extinguish or dismay? —In the following passages, the true character of Falstaff, as to courage and principle, is finely touched, and the different colours at once nicely blended and distinguished. "If Percy be alive, I'll pierce him. If he do come in my way, so:—if he do not, if I come in his, willingly, let him

*make a carbonado of me. I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath; give me life; which, if I can save, so; if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there's an end."* One cannot say which prevails most here, profligacy or courage; they are both tinged alike by the same humour, and mingled in one common mass; yet, when we consider the superior force of Percy, as we must presently also that of Douglas, we shall be apt, I believe, in our secret heart, to forgive him. These passages are 'spoken in soliloquy and in battle: if every soliloquy made under similar circumstances, were as audible as Falstaff's, the imputation might perhaps be found too general for censure. These are among the passages that have impressed on the world an idea of cowardice in Falstaff;—yet why? He is resolute to take his fate: if Percy do come in his way, *so*;—if not, he will not *seek* inevitable destruction; he is willing to save his life, but, if that cannot be, why,—“honour

comes unlooked for, and there's an end." This surely is not the language of cowardice: it contains neither the bounce or whine of the character; he derides, it is true, and seems to renounce, that grinning idol of military zealots, *honour*. But Falstaff was a kind of military free-thinker, and has accordingly incurred the obloquy of his condition. He stands upon the ground of natural courage only, and common sense, and has, it seems, too much wit for a hero.— But let me be well understood:—I do not justify Falstaff for renouncing the point of honour; it proceeded doubtless from a general relaxation of mind, and profligacy of temper. Honour is calculated to aid and strengthen natural courage, and lift it up to heroism; but natural courage, which can act as such, without honour, is natural courage still; the very quality I wish to maintain to Falstaff. And if, without the aid of honour, he can act with firmness, his portion is only the more eminent and distinguished.

In such a character, it is to his actions, not his sentiments, that we are to look for conviction. But it may be still farther urged, in behalf of Falstaff, that there may be false honour as well as false religion. It is true; yet, even in that case, candour obliges me to confess, that the best men are most disposed to conform, and most likely to become the dupes of their own virtue. But it may however be more reasonably urged, that there are particular tenets, both in honour and religion, which it is the grossness of folly not to question. To seek out, to court, assured destruction, without leaving a single benefit behind, may be well reckoned in the number: and this is precisely the very folly which Falstaff seems to abjure;—nor are we, perhaps, entitled to say more, in the way of censure, than that he had not virtue enough to become the dupe of honour, nor prudence enough to hold his tongue. I am willing, however, if the reader pleases, to compound this matter, and

acknowledge, on my part, that Falstaff was in all respects the *old soldier*; that he had put himself under the sober discipline of discretion, and renounced, in a great degree at least, what he might call the vanities and superstitions of honour; if the reader will, on his part, admit that this might well be, without his renouncing, at the same time, the natural firmness and resolution he was born to.

But there is a formidable objection behind. Falstaff counterfeits basely on being attacked by Douglas; he assumes, in a cowardly spirit, the appearance of death, to avoid the reality. But there was no equality of force; not the least chance for victory or life. And is it the duty then, think we still, of true courage, to meet, without benefit to society, *certain death*? Or is it only the fantasy of honour?—But such a fiction is highly disgraceful;—true, and a man of nice honour might perhaps have *grinned* for it. But we must remem-



ber that Falstaff had a double character; he was a *wit* as well as a *soldier*; and his courage, however eminent, was but the *accessary*; his wit was the *principal*; and the part, which, if they should come in competition, he had the greatest interest in maintaining. . Vain indeed were the licentiousness of his principles, if he should seek death like a bigot, yet without the meed of honour; when he might live by wit, and increase the reputation of that wit *by* living. But why do I labour this point? It has been already anticipated, and our improved acquaintance with Falstaff will now require no more than a short narrative of the fact.

Whilst, in the battle of Shrewsbury, he is exhorting and encouraging the Prince, who is engaged with the *spirit Percy*—" *Well said, Hal; to him, Hal,*"—he is himself attacked by the *fiend Douglas*. There was no match; nothing remained but death or stratagem; grinning honour, or laughing life. But an expedient offers, a mirthful

one:—take your choice, Falstaff, a point of honour, or a point of drollery.—It could not be a question;—Falstaff falls, Douglas is cheated, and the world laughs. But does he fall like a coward? No, like a buffoon only; the superior principle prevails, and Falstaff lives, by a stratagem growing out of his character, to prove himself *no counterfeit*, to jest, to be employed, and to fight again. That Falstaff valued himself, and expected to be valued by others, upon this piece of saving wit, is plain. It was a stratagem, it is true; it argued presence of mind; but it was moreover, what he most liked, a very laughable joke; and as such he considers it; for he continues to counterfeit after the danger is over, that he may also deceive the Prince, and improve the event into more laughter. He might, for ought that appears, have concealed the transaction; the Prince was too earnestly engaged for observation; he might have formed a thousand excuses for his fall; but

he lies still and listens to the pronouncing of his epitaph by the Prince, with all the wag-gish glee and levity of his character. The circumstance of his wounding Percy in the thigh, and carrying the dead body on his back, like luggage, is *indecent*, but not cowardly. The declaring, though in jest, that he killed Percy, seems to me *idle*, but it is not meant or calculated for *imposition*; it is spoken to the Prince himself, the man in the world who could not be, or be supposed to be, imposed on. But we must hear, whether to the purpose or not, what it is that Harry has to say over the remains of his old friend:

“ *P. Hen.* What, old acquaintance ! could not all  
this flesh  
Keep in a little life ? Poor Jack, farewell !  
I could have better spar’d a better man.  
Oh ! I should have a heavy miss of thee,  
If I were much in love with vanity.  
Death hath not struck so fat a *deer* to-day,  
Though many *dearer* in this bloody fray ;

OF SIR JOHN FALSTAFF.

tinct and separate subsistence; he laughs at the chace, and when the sport is over, gathers them with unruffled feather under his wing: and hence it is that he is made to undergo not one detection only, but a series of detections; that he is not formed for one play only, but was intended originally at least for two; and the author, we are told, was doubtful if he should not extend him yet farther, and engage him in the wars with France. This he might well have done, for there is nothing perishable in the nature of Falstaff: he might have involved him, by the vicious part of his character, in new difficulties and unlucky situations, and have enabled him, by the better part, to have scrambled through, abiding and retorting the jests and laughter of every beholder.

But whatever we may be told concerning the intention of Shakespeare to extend this character farther, there is a manifest preparation near the end of the second part of

bered too? what, no surprise that Falstaff should lie by the side of the noble Percy in the bed of honour! No reflection, that flight, though unfettered by disease, could not avail; that fear could not find a subterfuge from death? Shall his corpulency and his vanities be recorded, and his more characteristic quality of cowardice, even in the moment that it particularly demanded notice and reflection, be forgotten? If, by sparing a better man, be here meant a *better soldier*, there is no doubt but there were better soldiers in the army, more active, more young, more principled, more knowing; but none, it seems, taken for all in all, more acceptable. The comparative *better*, used here, leaves to Falstaff the praise at

gloom and darkness of the mind; it is an effort of fortitude, which, failing in the operation, becomes the truest, because the most unaffected, *pathos*; and a skilful actor, well managing his tone and action, might, with this miserable pun, steep a whole audience suddenly in tears.

least of *good* ; and to be a good soldier, is to be a great way from coward. • But Falstaff's goodness, in this sort, appears to have been not only enough to redeem him from disgrace, but to mark him with reputation ; if I were to add, with *eminence* and *distinction*, the funeral honours, which are intended his obsequies, and his being bid, till then, *to lie in blood by the noble Percy*, would fairly bear me out.

Upon the whole of the passages yet before us, why may I not reasonably hope that the good-natured reader, (and I write to no other,) not offended at the levity of this exercise, may join with me in thinking that the character of Falstaff, as to valour, may be fairly and honestly summed up in the very words which he himself uses to Harry ; and which seem, as to this point, to be intended by Shakespeare as a *compendium* of his character. “*What,*” says the Prince, “*a coward, Sir John Paunch !*”—Falstaff replies, “*Indeed, I am not John of*

Gaunt, *your grandfather ; but yet no coward, Hal?*

The robbery at Gads-hill comes now to be considered. But *here*, after such long argumentation, we may be allowed to breathe a little.

I know not what impression has been made on the reader ; a good deal of evidence has been produced, and much more remains to be offered. But how many sorts of men are there whom no evidence can persuade ! How many, who, ignorant of Shakespeare, or forgetful of the text, may as well read heathen Greek, or the laws of the land, as this unfortunate commentary ? How many, who, proud and pedantic, hate all novelty, and damn it, without mercy, under one compendious word, *paradox* ? How many more, who, not deriving their opinions immediately from the sovereignty of reason, hold at the will of some superior lord, to whom accident, or inclination has attached them, and who, true to their vas-

salage, are resolute not to surrender, without express permission, their base and ill-gotten possessions. These, however habited, are the mob of mankind, who hoot and holla, hiss or huzza, just as their various leaders may direct. I *challenge* the whole pannel, as not holding by free tenure, and therefore not competent to the purpose either of condemnation or acquittal. But, to the men of very nice honour, what shall be said? I speak not of your men of good service, but such as Mr. \* \* \* \* “*Souls made of fire, and children of the sun.*” These gentlemen, I am sadly afraid, cannot, in honour or prudence, admit of any composition in the very nice article of courage; *suspicion* is *disgrace*, and they cannot stay to parley with dishonour. The misfortune in cases of this kind, is, that it is not easy to obtain a fair and impartial jury: when we censure others, with an eye to our own applause, we are as seldom sparing of reproach, as inquisitive into circumstance;



and bold is the man, who, tenacious of justice, shall venture to weigh circumstances, or draw lines of distinction between cowardice and any apparently similar or neighbour quality : as well may a lady, virgin or matron, of immaculate honour, presume to pity or palliate the soft failing of some unguarded friend, and thereby confess, as it were, those sympathetic feelings which it behoves her to conceal under the most contemptuous disdain ; a disdain, always proportioned, I believe, to a certain consciousness which we must not explain. I am afraid that poor Falstaff has suffered not a little, and may yet suffer, by this fastidiousness of temper. But, though we may find these classes of men rather unfavourable to our wishes, the ladies, one may hope, whose smiles are most worth our ambition, may be found more propitious ; yet they too, through a generous conformity to the *brave*, are apt to take up the high tone of honour. Heroism is an idea perfectly con-

formable to the natural delicacy and elevation of their minds. Should we be fortunate enough, therefore, to redeem Falstaff from the imputations of cowardice, yet plain courage, I am afraid, will not serve the turn: even *their* heroes, I think, must be for the most part in the bloom of youth, or *just where youth ends, in manhood's freshest prime*; but to be "*Old, cold, and of intolerable entrails; to be fat and greasy; as poor as Job, and as slanderous as Satan*;"—take him away, he merits not a fair trial; he is too offensive to be turned, too odious to be touched. I grant, indeed, that the subject of our lecture is not without his infirmity; "*He cuts three inches on the ribs, he was short-winded*," and his breath possibly not of the sweetest: "*He had the gout*," or something worse, "*which played the rogue with his great toe*."—But these considerations are not to the point; we shall conceal, as much as may be, these offences; our business is with his *heart* only, which, as we

shall endeavour to demonstrate, lies in the right place, and is firm and sound, notwithstanding a few indications to the contrary. —As for you, Mrs. MONTAGUE, I am grieved to find that *you* have been involved in a popular error; so much you must allow me to say;—for the rest, I bow to your genius and your virtues: you have given to the world a very elegant composition: and, I am told, your manners and your mind are yet more pure, more elegant, than your book. Falstaff was too gross, too infirm, for your inspection; but, if you durst have looked nearer, you would not have found cowardice in the number of his infirmities. —We will try if we cannot redeem him from this universal censure.—Let the venal corporation of authors duck *to the golden fool*, let them shape their sordid quills to the mercenary ends of unmerited praise, or of baser detraction;—*old Jack*, though deserted by princes, though censured by an ungrateful world, and persecuted from age

to age by critic and commentator, and though never rich enough to hire one literary prostitute, shall find a voluntary defender; and that, too, at a time when the whole body of the *Nabobry* demands and requires defence; whilst their ill-gotten and almost untold gold feels loose in their unassured grasp, and whilst they are ready to shake off portions of the enormous heap, that they may the more securely clasp the remainder.—But not to digress without end, —to the candid, to the cheerful, to the elegant, reader we appeal; our exercise is much too light for the sour eye of strict severity; it professes amusement only, but we hope of a kind more rational than the *History of Miss Betsy*, eked out with the *Story of Miss Lucy*, and the *Tale of Mr. Twankum*: and so, in a leisure hour, and with the good-natured reader, it may be hoped, to a friend, we return, with an air as busy and important as if we were engaged in the grave office of measuring the Pyra-

mids, or settling the antiquity of Stonehenge, to converse with this jovial, this fat, this roguish, this frail, but, I think, *not cowardly*, companion.

Though the robbery at Gads-hill, and the supposed cowardice of Falstaff on that occasion, are next to be considered, yet I must previously declare, that I think the discussion of this matter to be *now* unessential to the re-establishment of Falstaff's reputation as a man of courage. For, suppose we should grant, in form, that Falstaff was surprised with fear, in this single instance, that he was off his guard, and even acted like a coward; what will follow, but that Falstaff, like greater heroes, had his weak moment, and was not exempted from panic and surprise? If a single exception can destroy a general character, Hector was a *coward*, and Anthony a *polltroon*. But, for these seeming contradictions of character, we shall seldom be at a loss to account, if we carefully refer to circum-

stance and situation.—In the present instance, Falstaff had done an illegal act ; the exertion was over ; and he had unbent his mind in security. The spirit of enterprise, and the animating principle of hope, were withdrawn :—in this situation, he is unexpectedly attacked ; he has no time to recall his thoughts, or bend his mind to action. He is not now acting in the profession and in the habits of a soldier ; he is associated with known cowards ; his assailants are vigorous, sudden, and bold ; he is conscious of guilt ; he has dangers to dread of every form, present and future ; prisons and gibbets, as well as sword and fire ; he is surrounded with darkness ; and the sheriff, the hangman, and the whole posse comitatus, may be at his heels :—without a moment for reflection, is it wonderful that, under these circumstances, “ *he should run and roar, and carry his guts away with as much dexterity as possible ?* ”

But though I might well rest the ques-

tion on this ground, yet, as there remain many good topics of vindication, and as I think a more minute inquiry into this matter will only bring out more evidence in support of Falstaff's constitutional courage, I will not decline the discussion. I beg permission therefore to state fully, as well as fairly, the whole of this obnoxious transaction, this unfortunate robbery at Gads-hill.

In the scene wherein we become first acquainted with Falstaff, his character is opened in a manner worthy of Shakespeare: we see him in a green old age, mellow, frank, gay, easy, corpulent, loose, unprincipled, and luxurious; a robber, as he says, by his vocation; yet not altogether so:—there was much, it seems, of mirth and recreation in the case: “*The poor abuses of the times,*” he wantonly and humourously tells the Prince, “*want countenance; and he hates to see resolution fobbed off, as it is, by the rusty curb of old father*

*antic, the law.*”—When he quits the scene, we are acquainted that he is only passing to the tavern: “*Farewell,*” says he, with an air of careless jollity and gay content, “*you will find me in East-Cheap.*”—“*Farewell,*” says the Prince, “*thou latter spring; farewell, all-hallowen summer.*” But, though all this is excellent for Shakespeare’s purposes, we find, as yet at least, no hint of Falstaff’s cowardice, no appearance of braggadocio, or any preparation whatever for laughter under this head.—The instant Falstaff is withdrawn, Poins opens to the Prince his meditated scheme of a double robbery; and here then, we may reasonably expect to be let into these parts of Falstaff’s character.—We shall see.

“*Poins. Now, my good sweet lord, ride with us to-morrow; I have a jest to execute, that I cannot manage alone. Falstaff, Bardolph, Peto, and Gadshill, shall rob those men that we have already waylaid; yourself and I will not be there; and when they have*



*the booty, if you and I do not rob them, cut this head from off my shoulders."*

This is giving strong surety for his words; perhaps he thought the case required it: "*But how,*" says the Prince, "*shall we part with them in setting forth?*" Poins is ready with his answer; he had matured the thought, and could solve every difficulty:— "*They could set out before, or after; their horses might be tied in the wood; they could change their visors; and he had already procured cases of buckram to inmask their outward garments.*" This was going far; it was doing business in good earnest. But if we look into the Play, we shall be better able to account for this activity; we shall find that there was, at least, as much malice as jest in Poins's intention. The rival situations of Poins and Falstaff had produced on both sides much jealousy and ill-will, which occasionally appears, in Shakespeare's manner, by side-lights, without confounding the main action; and by the little

we see of this Poins, he appears to be an unamiable, if not a very brutish and bad, character.—But to pass this;—the Prince next says, with a deliberate and wholesome caution, “*I doubt they will be too hard for us.*” Poins’s reply is remarkable; “*Well, for two of them, I know them to be as true-bred cowards as ever turned back; and for the third, if he fights longer than he sees cause, I will forswear arms.*” There is in this reply a great deal of management: there were *four* persons in all, as Poins well knew, and he had himself, but a little before, named them,—Falstaff, Bardolph, Peto, and Gadshill; but now he omits one of the number, which must be either Falstaff, as not subject to any imputation in point of courage; and in that case, Peto will be the *third*;—or, as I rather think, in order to diminish the force of the Prince’s objection, he artfully drops Gadshill, who was then out of town, and might therefore be supposed to be less in the Prince’s notice; and,

upon this supposition, Falstaff will be the *third, who will not fight longer than he sees reason*. But, on either supposition, what evidence is there of a pre-supposed cowardice in Falstaff? On the contrary, what stronger evidence can we require that the courage of Falstaff had to this hour, through various trials, stood wholly unimpeached, than that Poins, the ill-disposed Poins, who ventures, for his own purposes, to steal, as it were, *one* of the *four* from the notice and memory of the Prince, and who shews himself, from worse motives, as skilful in *diminishing*, as Falstaff appears afterwards to be in *increasing*, of numbers,—than that this very Poins should not venture to put down Falstaff in the list of cowards; though the occasion so strongly required that he should be degraded. What Poins dares do however in this sort, he *does*. “*As to the third*,” for so he describes Falstaff, (as if the name of this veteran would have excited too strongly the ideas of courage and re-

sistance,) "*if he fights longer than he sees reason, I will forswear arms.*" This is the old trick of cautious and artful malice: the turn of expression, or the tone of voice, does all; for, as to the words themselves, simply considered, they might be now truly spoken of almost any man who ever lived, except the iron-headed hero of Sweden.—But Poinz however adds something, which may appear more decisive: "*The virtue of this jest will be, the incomprehensible lies which this fat rogue will tell when we meet at supper; how, thirty at least he fought with; and what wards, what blows, what extremities, he endured: and in the reproof of this, lies the jest:*"—yes, and the malice too.—This prediction was unfortunately fulfilled, even beyond the letter of it; a completion more incident, perhaps, to the predictions of malice than of affection. But we shall presently see how far either the prediction, or the event, will go to the impeachment of Falstaff's courage.—The Prince, who is

never duped, comprehends the whole of Poins's views. But let that pass.

In the next scene, we behold all the parties at Gads-hill in preparation for the robbery. Let us carefully examine if it contain any intimation of cowardice in Falstaff. He is shewn under a very ridiculous vexation about his horse, which is hid from him; but this is nothing to the purpose, or only proves that Falstaff knew no terror equal to that of walking *eight yards of uneven ground*. But, on occasion of Gadshill's being asked concerning the number of the travellers, and having reported that they were eight or ten, Falstaff exclaims, "*Zounds! will they not rob us?*" If he had said more seriously, "*I doubt they will be too hard for us,*"—he would then have only used the Prince's own words upon a less alarming occasion. This cannot need defence. But the Prince, in his usual style of mirth, replies, "*What, a coward, Sir John Paunch!*" To this, one would naturally ex-

pect from Falstaff some light answer ; but we are surprised with a very serious one ; —“ *I am not indeed John of Gaunt, your grandfather, but yet no coward, Hal.*” This is singular : it contains, I think, the true character of Falstaff ; and it seems to be thrown out *here*, at a very critical conjuncture, as a caution to the audience not to take too sadly what was intended only (to use the Prince’s words) “ *as argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever after.*” The whole of Falstaff’s past life could not, it should seem, furnish the Prince with a reply, and he is, therefore, obliged to draw upon the coming hope. “ *Well, (says he, mysteriously,) let the event try ;*” meaning the event of the concerted attack on Falstaff ; an event so probable, that he might indeed venture to rely on it. —But the travellers approach : the Prince hastily proposes a division of strength ; that he with Poins should take a station separate from the rest, so that, if the travellers should

escape one party, they might light on the other: Falstaff does not object, though he supposes the travellers to be eight or ten in number. We next see Falstaff attack these travellers with alacrity, using the accustomed words of threat and terror;—they make no resistance, and he binds and robs them.

Hitherto, I think, there has not appeared the least *trait* either of boast or fear in Falstaff. But now comes on the concerted transaction, which has been the source of so much dishonour. *As they are sharing the booty*, (says the stage-direction,) *the Prince and Poins set upon them, they all run away; and Falstaff, after a blow or two, runs away too, leaving the booty behind them.*—“*Got with much ease.*” says the Prince, as an event beyond expectation, “*now merrily to horse.*”—Poins adds, as they are going off, “*How the rogue roared!*” This observation is afterwards remembered by the Prince, who, urging the jest to Fal-

staff, says, doubtless with all the licence of exaggeration,—“*And you, Falstâff, carried your guts away as nimbly, with as quick dexterity, and roared for mercy, and still ran and roared, as I ever heard bull-calf.*” If he did roar for mercy, it must have been a very inarticulate sort of roaring; for there is not a single word set down for Falstaff from which this roaring may be inferred, or any stage-direction to the actor for that purpose: but, in the spirit of mirth and derision, the lightest exclamation might be easily converted into the roar of a bull-calf.

We have now gone through this transaction, considered simply on its own circumstances, and without reference to any future boast or imputation. It is upon these circumstances the case must be tried, and every colour subsequently thrown on it, either by wit or folly, ought to be discharged. Take it, then, as it stands hitherto, with reference only to its own preceding and concomitant circumstances, and to the



unbounded ability of Shakespeare to obtain his own ends ; and we must, I think, be compelled to confess that this transaction was never intended by Shakespeare to detect and expose the false pretences of a real coward ; but, on the contrary, to involve a man of allowed courage, though in other respects of a very peculiar character, in such circumstances and suspicions of cowardice as might, by the operation of those peculiarities, produce afterwards much temporary mirth among his familiar and intimate companions : of this, we cannot require a stronger proof than the great attention which is paid to the decorum and truth of character, in the stage-direction already quoted : it appears, thence, that it was not thought *decent* that Falstaff should run at all, until he had been deserted by his companions, and had even afterwards exchanged blows with his assailants ;—and thus, a just distinction is kept up between the natural cowardice of the three associ-

ates, and the accidental terror of Falstaff.

Hitherto, then, I think it is very clear that no laughter either is, or is intended to be, raised upon the score of Falstaff's cowardice. For, after all, it is not singularly ridiculous that an old inactive man, of no boast, as far as appears, or extraordinary pretensions to valour, should endeavour to save himself by flight from the assault of two bold and vigorous assailants. The very players, who are, I think, the very worst judges of Shakespeare, have been made sensible, I suppose from long experience, that there is nothing in this transaction to excite any extraordinary laughter; but this they take to be a defect in the management of their author, and therefore I imagine it is, that they hold themselves obliged to supply the vacancy, and fill it up with some low buffoonery of their own. Instead of the despatch necessary on this occasion, they bring Falstaff, *stuffing and all*, to the very front of the stage; where,

with much mummary and grimace, he seats himself down, with a canvas money-bag in his hand, to divide the spoil. In this situation, he is attacked by the Prince and Poins, whose tin swords hang idly in the air, and delay to strike, till the *player* Falstaff, who seems more troubled with flatulence than fear, is able to rise; which is not till after some ineffectual efforts, and with the assistance (to the best of my memory) of one of the thieves, who lingers behind, in spite of terror, for this friendly purpose; after which, without any resistance on his part, he is goaded off the stage, like a fat ox for slaughter, by these *stony-hearted* drivers in *buckram*. I think, he does not *roar*;—perhaps the player had never perfected himself in the tones of a bull-calf. This whole transaction should be shewn between the interstices of a back scene: the less we *see*, in such cases, the better we conceive. Something of resistance, and afterwards of celerity in flight, we should

be made witnesses of; the *roar* we should take on the credit of Poins. Nor is there any occasion for all that bolstering with which they fill up the figure of Falstaff; they do not distinguish betwixt humorous exaggeration and necessary truth. The Prince is called *starveling*, *dried neat's tongue*, *stock-fish*, and other names of the same nature; they might, with almost as good reason, search the glass-houses for some exhausted stoker, to furnish out a Prince of Wales of sufficient correspondence to this picture.

We next come to the scene of Falstaff's braggadocioes. I have already wandered too much into details; yet I must, however, bring Falstaff forward to this last scene of trial, in all his proper colouring and proportions. The progressive discovery of Falstaff's character is excellently managed. In the first scene we become acquainted with his figure, which we must in some degree consider as a part of his

character; we hear of his gluttony and his debaucheries, and become witnesses of that indistinguishable mixture of humour and licentiousness which runs through his whole character; but what we are principally struck with, is the ease of his manners and deportment, and the unaffected freedom and wonderful pregnancy of his wit and humour. We see him, in the next scene, agitated with vexation: his horse is concealed from him, and he gives, on this occasion, so striking a description of his distress, and his words so labour and are so loaded with heat and vapour, that, but for laughing, we should pity him; laugh, however, we must at the extreme incongruity of a man, at once corpulent and old, associating with youth in an enterprise demanding the utmost extravagance of spirit, and all the wildness of activity: and this it is which makes his complaints so truly ridiculous. “*Give me my horse!*” says he, in another spirit than that of Richard; “*Eight yards*

*of uneven ground,"* adds this Forester of Diana, this enterprising gentleman of the shade, "*is threescore and ten miles a-foot with me.*"—In the heat and agitation of the robbery, out come more and more extravagant instances of incongruity. Though he is most probably older and much fatter than either of the travellers, yet he calls them, *Bacons, bacon-fed, and gorbellied knaves*: "*Hang them,*" says he, "*fat chuffs, they hate us youth. What! young men must live:—you are grand jurors, are ye? We'll jure ye, i'faith.*" But, as yet, we do not see the whole length and breadth of him: this is reserved for the braggadocio scene. We expect entertainment, but we don't well know of what kind. Poins, by his prediction, has given us a hint: but we do not see or feel Falstaff to be a coward, much less a boaster; without which, even cowardice is not sufficiently ridiculous; and therefore it is, that on the stage, we find them always connected. In this un-

certainly on our part, he is, with much artful preparation, produced. His entrance is delayed, to stimulate our expectation; and, at last, to take off the dullness of anticipation, and to add surprise to pleasure, he is called in, as if for another purpose of mirth than what we are furnished with. We now behold him, fluctuating with fiction, and labouring with dissembled passion and chagrin: too full for utterance, Pains provokes him by a few simple words, containing a fine contrast of affected ease. “*Welcome, Jack, where hast thou been?*” But when we hear him burst forth, “*A plague on all cowards! give me a cup of sack. Is there no virtue extant?*”—we are at once in possession of the whole man, and are ready to hug him, guts, lies, and all, as an inexhaustible fund of pleasantry and humour. Cowardice, I apprehend, is out of our thought; it does not, I think, mingle in our mirth. As to this point, I have presumed to say already, and I repeat it, that we are, in my

opinion, the dupes of our own wisdom, of systematic reasoning, of second thought, and after reflection. The first spectators, I believe, thought of nothing but the laughable scrape which so singular a character was falling into, and were delighted to see a humorous and unprincipled wit so happily taken in his own inventions, precluded from all rational defence, and driven to the necessity of crying out, after a few ludicrous evasions, “*No more of that, Hal, if thou lov’st me.*”

I do not conceive myself obliged to enter into a consideration of Falstaff’s lies concerning the transaction at Gads-hill. I have considered his conduct as independent of those lies; I have examined the whole of it apart, and found it free of cowardice or fear, except in one instance, which I have endeavoured to account for and excuse. I have therefore a right to infer that those lies are to be derived, not from cowardice, but from some other part of his cha-



racter, which it does not concern me to examine : but I have not contented myself hitherto with this sort of negative defence ; and the reader I believe is aware that I am resolute (though, I confess, not untired) to carry this fat rogue out of the reach of every imputation which affects, or may seem to affect, his natural courage.

The first observation then which strikes us, as to his braggadocioes, is, that they are braggadocioes *after the fact*. In other cases, we see the coward of the play bluster and boast for a time, talk of distant wars, and private duels, out of the reach of knowledge and of evidence ; of storms and stratagems, and of falling in upon the enemy pell-mell, and putting thousands to the sword ; till, at length, on the proof of some present and apparent fact, he is brought to open and lasting shame ; to shame, I mean, as a *coward* ; for, as to what there is of *liar* in the case, it is considered only as accessory, and scarcely reckoned into the ac-

count of dishonour. But in the instance before us, every thing is reversed: the play opens with the *fact*; a fact, from its circumstances, as well as from the age and inactivity of the man, very excusable and capable of much apology, if not defence. This fact is preceded by no bluster or pretence whatever;—the lies and braggadocioes follow; but they are not general; they are confined, and have reference to this one fact only; the detection is immediate; and, after some accompanying mirth and laughter, the shame of that detection ends; it has no duration, as in other cases; and, for the rest of the play, the character stands just where it did before, without any punishment or degradation whatever.

To account for all this, let us only suppose that Falstaff was a man of natural courage, though in all respects unprincipled; but that he was surprised, in one single instance, into an act of real terror; which, instead of excusing upon circumstances, he

endeavours to cover by lies and braggadocio ; and that these lies become there-upon the subject, in this place, of detection. Upon these suppositions the whole difficulty will vanish at once, and every thing be natural, common, and plain. The *fact* itself will be of course excusable ; that is, it will arise out of a combination of such circumstances, as, being applicable to one case only, will not destroy the general character : it will not be preceded by any braggadocio, containing any fair indication of cowardice ; as real cowardice is not supposed to exist in the character. But the first act of real or apparent cowardice would naturally throw a vain unprincipled man into the use of lies and braggadocio ; but these would have reference only to the fact in question, and not apply to other cases nor infect his general character, which is not supposed to stand in need of imposition. Again,—the detection of cowardice, as such, is more diverting after a long and va-

rious course of pretence, where the lie of character is preserved, as it were, whole, and brought into sufficient magnitude for a burst of discovery; yet, mere occasional lies, such as Falstaff is hereby supposed to utter, are, for the purpose of sport, best detected in the telling; because, indeed, they cannot be preserved for a future time; the exigence and the humour will be past: but the shame arising to Falstaff from the detection of mere lies would be temporary only; his character, as to this point, being already known, and tolerated for the humour. Nothing, therefore, could follow but mirth and laughter, and the temporary triumph of baffling a wit at his own weapons, and reducing him to an absolute surrender: after which, we ought not to be surprised if we see him rise again, like a boy from play, and run another race with as little dishonour as before.

What then can, we say, but that it is clearly the lies only, not the cowardice, of

Falstaff which are here detected : *lies*, to which what there may be of cowardice is incidental only, improving indeed the jest, but by no means the real business, of the scene. And now also we may more clearly discern the true force and meaning of Poins's prediction. "*The jest will be*," says he, "*the incomprehensible lies that this fat rogue will tell us : how, thirty at least he fought with :— and, in the reproof of this, lies the jest ;*" that is, in the detection of these lies simply ; for, as to *courage*, he had never ventured to insinuate more than that Falstaff would not fight longer than he saw cause : Poins was in expectation indeed that Falstaff would fall into some dishonour on this occasion ; an event highly probable : but this was not, it seems, to be the principal ground of their mirth, but the detection of those incomprehensible lies, which he boldly predicts, upon his knowledge of Falstaff's character, this fat rogue, not *coward*, would tell them. \*This predic-

tion therefore, and the completion of it, go only to the impeachment of Falstaff's veracity, and not of his courage. "*These lies,*" says the Prince, "*are like the father of them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable. — Why, thou clay-brained guts, thou knotty-pated fool; how couldst thou know these men in Kendal Green, when it was so dark thou couldst not see thy hand? Come, tell us your reason.*"

"Poins. *Come, your reason, Jack, your reason.*"

Again, says the Prince, "*Hear how a plain tale shall put you down. — What trick, what device, what starting-hôle, canst thou now find out, to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?*"

"Poins. *Come, let's hear, Jack, what trick hast thou now?*"

All this clearly refers to Falstaff's lies only *as such*; and the objection seems to be, that he had not told them well, and with sufficient skill and probability. Indeed,

nothing seems to have been required of Falstaff, at any period of time, but a good evasion. The truth is, that there is so much mirth, and so little of malice or imposition, in his fictions, that they may for the most part be considered as mere strains of humour and exercises of wit, impeachable only for defect, when that happens, of the quality from which they are principally derived. Upon this occasion, Falstaff's evasions fail him ; he is at the end of his invention ; and it seems fair that, in defect of wit, the law should pass upon him, and that he should undergo the temporary censure of that cowardice which he could not pass off by any evasion whatever. The best he could think of, was *instinct* : he was indeed a *coward upon instinct* ; in that respect like a valiant lion, who would not touch the true Prince. It would have been a vain attempt, the reader will easily perceive, in Falstaff, to have gone upon other ground, and to have aimed at justifying his

courage by a serious vindication: this would have been to have mistaken the true point of argument: it was his *lies*, not his courage, which were really in question. There was, besides, no getting out of the toils in which he had entangled himself: if he was not, he ought at least, by his own shewing, to have *been at half-sword with a dozen of them, two hours together*; whereas, it unfortunately appears, and that too evidently to be evaded, that he had run with singular celerity from *two*, after the exchange of *a few blows* only. This precluded Falstaff from all rational defence, in his own person; but it has not precluded me, who am not the advocate of his lies, but of his courage.

But there are other singularities in Falstaff's lies, which go more directly to his vindication. That they are confined to one scene and one occasion only, we are not *now* at a loss to account for; but what shall we say to their extravagance? The lies of



Parolles and Bobadil are brought into some shape ; but the fictions of Falstaff are so preposterous and incomprehensible, that one may fairly doubt if they ever were intended for credit ; and therefore, if they ought to be called lies, and not rather *humour* ; or, to compound the matter, *humorous rhodomontades*. Certain it is, that they destroy their own purpose, and are clearly not the effect, in this respect, of a regulated practice and habit of imposition. The real truth seems to be, that had Falstaff, loose and unprincipled as he is, been born a coward and bred a soldier, he must, naturally, have been a great braggadocio, a true *Miles Gloriosus* : but, in such a case, he should have been exhibited active and young ; for it is plain, that age and corpulency are an excuse for cowardice, which ought not to be afforded him. In the present case, wherein he was not only involved in suspicious circumstances, but wherein he seems to have felt some conscious touch

of infirmity, and having no candid construction to expect from his laughing companions, he bursts at once, and with all his might, into the most unweighed and preposterous fictions, determined to put to proof on this occasion his boasted talent of *swearing truth out of England*. He tried it here to its utmost extent, and was unfortunately routed on his own ground ; which indeed, with such a mine beneath his feet, could not be otherwise. But without this, he had mingled in his deceits so much whimsical humour and fantastic exaggeration, that he must have been detected ; and herein appears the admirable address of Shakespeare, who can shew us Falstaff in the various light, not only of what he is, but what he would have been, under one single variation of character,—the want of natural courage ; whilst, with an art not enough understood, he most effectually preserves the real character of Falstaff, even in the moment he seems to depart from it,

by making his lies too extravagant for practised imposition ; by grounding them more upon humour, than deceit ; and turning them ; as we shall next see, into a fair and honest proof of general courage, by appropriating them to the concealment only of a single exception. And hence it is, that we see him draw so deeply and so confidently upon his former credit for courage and achievement : “ *I never dealt better in my life,—thou know’st my old ward, Hal;*” are expressions, which clearly refer to some known feats and defences of his former life. His exclamations against cowardice, his reference to his own manhood, “ *Die when thou wilt, old Jack, if manhood, good manhood, be not forgot upon the face of the earth, then am I a shotten herring.*” These, and various expressions such as these, would be absurdities not impositions, farce not comedy, if not calculated to conceal some defect, supposed to be unknown to the hearers ; and these hearers were, in the

present case, his constant companions, and the daily witnesses of his conduct. If, before this period, he had been a known and detected coward, and was conscious that he had no credit to lose, I see no reason why he should fly so violently from a familiar ignominy which had often before attached to him; or why falsehoods, seemingly in such a case neither calculated for or expecting credit, should be censured, or detected, as lies or imposition.

That the whole transaction was considered as a mere jest, and as carrying with it no serious imputation on the courage of Falstaff, is manifest, not only from his being allowed, when the laugh was past, to call himself, without contradiction, in the personated character of Hal himself, "*valiant Jack Falstaff, and the more valiant, being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff,*" but from various other particulars, and, above all, from the declaration, which the Prince makes on that very night, of his intention of procu-

ring this fat rogue a charge of foot;—a circumstance, doubtless, contrived by Shakespeare to wipe off the seeming dishonour of the day: and from this time forward, we hear of no imputation arising from this transaction; it is born and dies in a convivial hour; it leaves no trace behind, nor do we see any longer, in the character of Falstaff, the boasting or braggadocio of a coward.

Though I have considered Falstaff's character as relative only to one single quality, yet so much has been said, that it cannot escape the reader's notice that he is a character made up by Shakespeare wholly of incongruities;—a man at once young and old, enterprising and fat, a dupe and a wit, harmless and wicked, weak in principle and resolute by constitution, cowardly in appearance and brave in reality; a knave without malice, a liar without deceit; and a knight, a gentleman, and a soldier, without either dignity, decency, or honour: this

is a character, which, though it may be decomposed, could not, I believe, have been formed, nor the ingredients of it duly mingled, upon any receipt whatever : it required the hand of Shakespeare himself to give to every particular part a relish of the whole, and of the whole, to every particular part ;—alike the same incongruous, identical, Falstaff, whether to the grave Chief-Justice he vainly talks of his youth, and offers to *cap*er for a thousand ; or cries to Mrs. Doll, “ *I am old, I am old,*” though she is seated on his lap, and he is courting her for busses. How Shakespeare could furnish out sentiment of so extraordinary a composition, and supply it with such appropriated and characteristic language, humour, and wit, I cannot tell ; but I may, however, venture to infer, and that confidently, that he who so well understood the uses of incongruity, and that laughter was to be raised by the opposition of qualities in the same man, and not by their agree-

ment or conformity, would never have attempted to raise mirth by shewing us cowardice in a coward unattended by pretence, and softened by every excuse of age, corpulence, and infirmity : and of this we cannot have a more striking proof than his furnishing this very character, on one instance of real terror, however excusable, with boast, braggadocio, and pretence, exceeding that of all other stage cowards, the whole length of his superior wit, humour, and invention.

What then, upon the whole, shall be said, but that Shakespeare has made certain *impressions*, or produced certain effects, of which he has thought fit to conceal or obscure the cause? How he has done this, and for what special ends, we shall now presume to guess.—Before the period in which Shakespeare wrote, the fools and zany's of the stage were drawn out of the coarsest and cheapest materials : some essential folly, with a dash of knave and cox-

comb, did the feat. But Shakespeare, who delighted in difficulties, was resolved to furnish a richer repast, and to give to one eminent buffoon the high relish of wit, humour, birth, dignity, and courage.\* But this was a process which required the nicest hand, and the utmost management and address: these enumerated qualities are, in their own nature, productive of *respect*; an impression the most opposite to laughter that can be. This impression then, it was, at all adventures, necessary to withhold; which could not perhaps well be without dressing up these qualities in fantastic forms, and colours not their own; and thereby cheating the eye with shews of baseness and of folly, whilst he stole, as it were, upon the palate a richer and a fuller *gott*. To this end, what arts, what contrivances, has he not practised! How has he steeped this singular character in bad habits for fifty years together, and brought him forth saturated with every folly and with



every vice, not destructive of his essential character, or incompatible with his own primary design! For this end, he has deprived Falstaff of every good principle; and for another, which will be presently mentioned, he has concealed every bad one. He has given him also every infirmity of body that is not likely to awaken our compassion, and which is most proper to render both his better qualities and his vices ridiculous: he has associated levity and debauch with *age*, corpulence and inactivity with *courage*, and has roguishly coupled the gout with *military honours*, and a *pension* with the *pox*. He has likewise involved this character in situations, out of which neither wit nor courage can extricate him with honour. The surprise at Gads-hill might have betrayed a hero into flight, and the encounter with Douglas left him no choice but death or stratagem. If he plays an after-game, and endeavours to redeem his ill fortune by lies and braggadocio, his

ground fails him ; no wit, no evasion, will avail : or, is he likely to appear respectable in his person, rank, and demeanor, how is that respect abated or discharged ! Shakespeare has given him a kind of state indeed ; but of what is it composed ? Of that fustian cowardly rascal Pistol, and his yoke-fellow, of few words, the equally deedless Nym ; of his cup-bearer, the fiery Trigon, whose zeal burns in his nose, Bardolph ; and of the boy, who bears the purse with *seven groats and two-pence* ;—a boy who was given him on purpose to set him off, and whom he walks *before*, according to his own description, “ *like a sow that had overwhelmed all her litter but one.* ”

But it was not enough to render Falstaff ridiculous in his figure, situations, and equipage ; *still* his respectable qualities would have come forth, at least occasionally, to spoil our mirth ; or they might have burst the intervention of such slight impediments, and have every where shone through : it

was necessary then to go farther, and throw on him that substantial ridicule, which only the incongruities of real vice can furnish; of vice, which was to be so mixed and blended with his frame as to give a durable character and colour to the whole.

But it may here be necessary to detain the reader a moment in order to apprise him of my farther intention; without which, I might hazard that good understanding, which I hope has hitherto been preserved between us.

I have, 'till now, looked only to the courage of Falstaff, a quality which having been denied, in terms, to belong to his constitution, I have endeavoured to vindicate to the understandings of my readers; the impression on their feelings (in which all dramatic truth consists) being already, as I have supposed, in favour of the character. In the pursuit of this subject, I have taken the general impression of the whole character pretty much, I suppose, like other men;

and, when occasion has required, have so transmitted it to the reader; joining in the common feeling of Falstaff's pleasantry, his apparent freedom from ill principle, and his companionable wit and good humour: with a stage character, in the article of exhibition, we have nothing more to do; for in fact what is it but an impression; an appearance, which we are to consider as a reality, and which we may venture to applaud or condemn as such, without farther inquiry or investigation? But, if we would account for our impressions, or for certain sentiments or actions in a character, not derived from its apparent principles, yet appearing, we know not why, natural, we are then compelled to look farther, and examine if there be not something more in the character than is *shewn*; something inferred, which is not brought under our special notice: in short, we must look to the art of the writer, and to the principles of human nature, to discover the hidden causes of

such effects.—Now this is a very different matter—the former considerations respected the impression only, without regard to the understanding ; but this question relates to the understanding alone. It is true that there are but few dramatic characters which will bear this kind of investigation, as not being drawn in exact conformity to those principles of general nature to which we must refer. But this is not the case with regard to the characters of Shakespeare ; they are struck out *whole*, by some happy art which I cannot clearly comprehend, out of the general mass of things, from the block as it were of nature : and it is, I think, an easier thing to give a just draught of man from these theatric forms, which I cannot help considering as originals, than by drawing from real life, amidst so much intricacy, obliquity, and disguise. If therefore, for farther proofs of Falstaff's courage, or for the sake of curious speculation, or for both, I change my position, and look to causes

instead of effects, the reader must not be surprised if he finds the former Falstaff vanish like a dream, and another, of more disgusting form, presented to his view; one, whose final punishment we shall be so far from regretting, that we ourselves shall be ready to consign him to a severer doom.

The reader will very easily apprehend that a character, which we might wholly disapprove of, considered as existing in human life, may yet be thrown on the stage into certain peculiar situations, and be compressed, by external influences, into such temporary appearances as may render such character, for a time, highly acceptable and entertaining, and even more distinguished for qualities, which, on this supposition, would be accidents only, than another character really possessing those qualities, but which, under the pressure of the same situation and influences, would be distorted into a different form, or totally lost in timidity and weakness. If therefore the character

before us will admit of this kind of investigation, our Inquiry will not be without some dignity, considered as extending to the principles of human nature, and to the genius and arts of him, who has best caught every various form of the human mind, and transmitted them with the greatest happiness and fidelity.

To return then to the vices of Falstaff.—We have frequently referred to them under the name of ill habits;—but perhaps the reader is not fully aware how very vicious he indeed is;—he is a robber, a glutton, a cheat, a drunkard, and a liar; lascivious, vain, insolent, profligate, and profane:—a fine infusion this, and such as without very excellent cookery must have thrown into the dish a great deal too much of the *fumet*. It was a nice operation;—these vices were not only to be of a particular sort, but it was also necessary to guard them at both ends; on the *one*, from all appearance of malicious motive, and indeed from the

manifestation of any ill principle whatever, which must have produced *disgust*,—a sensation no less opposite to laughter than is *respect*; and, on the *other*, from the notice, or even apprehension, in the spectators, of *pernicious effect*; which produces *grief* and *terror*, and is the proper province of tragedy alone.

*Actions* cannot, with strict propriety, be said to be either virtuous or vicious. These qualities, or attributes, belong to *agents* only; and are derived, even in respect to *them*, from *intention* alone. The abstracting of qualities, and considering them as independent of any *subject*, and the applying of them afterwards to actions independent of the agent, is a double operation which I do not pretend, through any part of it, to understand. All actions may most properly, in their own nature, I think, be called *neutral*; though in common discourse, and in writing, where precision is not requisite, we often term them *vicious*, transferring, on



these occasions, the attributive from the *agent* to the *action*; and sometimes we call them *evil*, or of pernicious effect, by transferring, in like manner, the injuries incidentally arising from certain actions to the life, happiness, or interest, of human beings, to the natural operation, whether moral or physical, of the *actions* themselves: *one* is a colour thrown on them by the *intention*, in which I think consists all moral turpitude, and the *other* by effect: if, therefore, a dramatic writer will use certain managements to keep vicious intention as much as possible from our notice, and make us sensible that no evil effect follows, he may pass off actions of very vicious motive, without much ill impression, as mere *incongruities*, and the effect of *humour* only;—*words these*, which, as applied to human conduct, are employed, I believe, to cover a great deal of what may deserve much harder appellation.

The *difference* between suffering an evil

effect to take place, and of preventing such effect, from actions precisely of the same nature, is so great, that it is often *all the difference* between Tragedy and Comedy. The fine gentleman of the comic scene, who so promptly draws his sword, and wounds, without killing, some other gentleman of the same sort; and *he* of tragedy, whose stabs are mortal; differ very frequently in no other point whatever. If our Falstaff had really *peppered* (as he calls it) *two rogues in buckram suits*, we must have looked for a very different conclusion, and have expected to have found Falstaff's essential prose converted into blank verse, and to have seen him move off, in slow and measured paces, like the city prentice to the tolling of a passing bell;—" *he would have become a cart as well as another, or a plague on his bringing up.*"

Every incongruity in a rational being is a source of laughter, whether it respects manners, sentiments, conduct, or even dress or

situation ;—but the greatest of all possible incongruity is vice, whether in the intention itself, or as transferred to, and becoming more manifest in, action ;—it is inconsistent with moral agency, nay, with rationality itself, and all the ends and purposes of our being.—Our author describes the natural ridicule of vice, in his *Measure for Measure*, in the strongest terms, where, after having made the angels weep over the vices of men, he adds, that *with* our spleens *they might laugh themselves quite mortal*. Indeed, if we had a perfect discernment of the ends of this life only, and could preserve ourselves from sympathy, disgust, and terror, the vices of mankind would be a source of perpetual entertainment. The great difference between Heraclitus and Democritus lay, it seems, in their spleen only ;—for a wise and good man must either laugh or cry without ceasing. Nor, indeed, is it easy to conceive (to instance in one case only) a more laughable or a more me-

lancholy object, than a human being, his nature and duration considered, earnestly and anxiously exchanging peace of mind and conscious integrity, for gold ; and for gold too, which he has often no occasion for, or dares not employ :—but Voltaire has by one publication rendered all *arguments* superfluous : he has told us, in his *Candide*, the merriest and most diverting tale of frauds, murders, massacres, rapes, rapine, desolation, and destruction, that I think it possible on any other plan to invent ; and he has given us *motive* and *effect*, with every possible aggravation, to improve the sport. One would think it difficult to preserve the point of ridicule, in such a case, unabated by contrary emotions ; but, now that the feat is performed, it appears of easy imitation, and I am amazed that our race of imitators have made no efforts in this sort : it would answer I should think in the way of profit, not to mention the moral uses to which it might be applied. The manage-

ments of Voltaire consist in this, that he assumes a gay, easy, and light, tone himself; that he never excites the reflections of his readers by making any of his own; that he hurries us on with such a rapidity of narration as prevents our emotions from resting on any particular point; and to gain this end, he has interwoven the conclusion of one fact so into the commencement of another, that we find ourselves engaged in new matter, before we are sensible that we had finished the old; he has likewise made his crimes so enormous, that we do not sadden on any sympathy, or find ourselves partakers in the guilt.—But, what is truly singular as to this book, is, that it does not appear to have been written for any moral purpose, but for that only (if I do not err) of satirising Providence itself; a design so enormously profane, that it may well pass for the most ridiculous part of the whole composition.

But if vice, divested of disgust and ter-

ror, be thus in its own nature ridiculous, we ought not to be surprised if the very same vices which spread horror and desolation through the tragic scene, should yet furnish the comic with its highest laughter and delight, and that tears, and mirth, and even humour and wit itself, should grow from the same root of incongruity: for, what is humour in the humourist, but incongruity, whether of sentiment, conduct, or manners? What, in the man of humour, but a quick discernment and keen sensibility of these incongruities? And what is wit itself, without presuming, however, to give a complete definition, (where so many have failed,) but a talent, for the most part, of marking, with force and vivacity, unexpected points of *likeness* in things supposed incongruous, and points of incongruity in things supposed alike: and hence it is that wit and humour, though always distinguished, are so often coupled together; it being very possible, I suppose, to be a man of humour without

wit ; but, I think, not a man of wit without humour.

But I have here raised so much new matter, that the reader may be out of hope of seeing this argument, any more than the tale of Tristram, brought to a conclusion : he may suppose me now prepared to turn my pen to a moral or to a dramatic Essay, or ready to draw the line between Vice and Virtue, or Comedy and Tragedy, as fancy shall lead the way :—but he is happily mistaken ; I am pressing earnestly, and not without some impatience, to a conclusion. The principles I have now opened are necessary to be considered for the purpose of estimating the character of Falstaff, considered as relatively to human nature : I shall then reduce him, with all possible despatch, to his theatric condition, and restore him, I hope, without injury, to the stage.

There is, indeed, a vein or two of argument running through the matter that now surrounds me, which I might open for my

own more peculiar purposes ; but which, having resisted much greater temptations, I shall wholly desert. It ought not, however, to be forgotten, that, if Shakespeare has used arts to abate our respect of Falstaff, it should follow, by just inference, that, without such arts, his character would have grown into a *respect* inconsistent with laughter ; and that yet, without courage, he could not have been respectable at all ;—that it required nothing less than the union of ability and courage to support his other more accidental qualities, with any tolerable coherence. Courage and ability are first principles of character, and not to be destroyed whilst the united frame of body and mind continues whole and unimpaired ; they are the pillars on which he stands firm, in spite of all his vices and disgraces ; but, if we should take courage away, and reckon cowardice among his other defects, all the intelligence and wit in the world could not support him through a single play.



The effect of taking away the influence of this quality upon the manners of a character, though the quality and the influence be assumed only, is evident in the cases of Parolles and Bobadil. Parolles, at least, did not seem to want wit; but both these characters are reduced almost to non-entity, and, after their disgraces, walk only through a scene or two, the mere mockery of their former existence. Parolles was so changed, that neither the Fool, nor the old lord Lefeu, could readily recollect his person; and his wit seemed to be annihilated with his courage.

Let it not be here objected, that Falstaff is universally considered as a coward;—we do indeed call him so; but that is nothing, if the character itself does not act from any *consciousness* of this kind, and if our feelings take his part, and revolt against our understanding.

As to the arts by which Shakespeare has contrived to obscure the vices of Falstaff,

they are such, as, being subservient only to the mirth of the play, I do not feel myself obliged to detail.

But it may be well worth our curiosity to inquire into the composition of Falstaff's character.—Every man, we may observe, has two characters; that is, every man may be seen externally, and from without;—or a section may be made of him, and he may be illuminated from within.

Of the external character of Falstaff, we can scarcely be said to have any steady view. *Jack Falstaff* we are familiar with, but *Sir John* was better known, it seems, to the rest of Europe, than to his intimate companions; yet we have so many glimpses of him, and he is opened to us occasionally in such various points of view, that we cannot be mistaken in describing him as a man of birth and fashion, bred up in all the learning and accomplishments of the times;—of ability and courage equal to any situation, and capable by nature of the high-

est affairs; trained to arms, and possessing the tone, the deportment, and the manners, of a gentleman;—but yet these accomplishments and advantages seem to hang loose upon him, and to be worn with a slovenly carelessness and inattention: a too great indulgence of the qualities of humour and wit seems to draw him too much one way, and to destroy the grace and orderly arrangement of his other accomplishments;—and hence he becomes strongly marked for one advantage, to the injury, and almost forgetfulness in the beholder, of all the rest. Some of his vices likewise strike through, and stain his exterior;—his modes of speech betray a certain licentiousness of mind; and that high aristocratic tone which belonged to his situation, was pushed on, and aggravated into unfeeling insolence and oppression. “*It is not a confirmed brow,*” says the Chief Justice, “*nor the throng of words that come with such more than impudent sauciness from you, can thrust me from a*

*level consideration.*”—“*My lord,*” answers Falstaff, “*you call honourable boldness, impudent sauciness. If a man will curtsy and say nothing, he is virtuous: no, my lord, my humble duty remembered, I will not be your suitor. I say to you I desire deliverance from these officers, being upon hasty employment in the king’s affairs.*”—“*You speak,*” replies the Chief Justice, “*as having power to do wrong.*”—His whole behaviour to the Chief Justice, whom he despairs of winning by flattery, is singularly insolent; and the reader will remember many instances of his insolence to others: nor are his manners always free from the taint of vulgar society;—“*This is the right fencing grace, my lord,*” (says he to the Chief Justice, with great impropriety of manners,) “*tap for tap, and so part fair.*”—“*Now, the Lord lighten thee,*” is the reflection of the Chief Justice, “*thou art a very great fool.*” Such a character as I have here described, strengthened with that vigour, force, and

alacrity of mind, of which he is possessed, must have spread terror and dismay through the ignorant, the timid, the modest, and the weak: yet is he, however, when occasion requires, capable of much accommodation and flattery;—and, in order to obtain the protection and patronage of the great, so convenient to his vices and his poverty, he was put under the daily necessity of practising and improving these arts; a baseness, which he compensates to himself, like other unprincipled men, by an increase of insolence towards his inferiors — There is, also, a natural activity about Falstaff, which, for want of proper employment, shews itself in a kind of swell or bustle, which seems to correspond with his bulk, as if his mind had inflated his body, and demanded a habitation of no less circumference: thus conditioned, he rolls (in the language of Ossian) like a *whale of ocean*, scattering the smaller fry; but affording, in his turn, noble contention to Hal and Poins; who, to keep up

the allusion, I may be allowed on this occasion to compare to the *thresher* and the *sword-fish*.

To this part of Falstaff's character, many things which he does and says, and which appear unaccountably natural, are to be referred.

We are next to see him *from within*: and here we shall behold him most villainously unprincipled and debauched; possessing, indeed, the same courage and ability, yet stained with numerous vices, unsuited not only to his primary qualities, but to his age, corpulency, rank, and profession;—reduced by these vices to a state of dependence, yet resolutely bent to indulge them at any price. These vices have been already enumerated; they are many, and become still more intolerable by an excess of unfeeling insolence on one hand, and of base accommodation on the other.

But what then, after all, is become of *old Jack*? Is this the jovial delightful compa-

nion—Falstaff, the favourite and the boast of the stage?—by no means. But it is, I think however, the *Falstaff* of nature; the very stuff out of which the *stage* Falstaff is composed; nor was it possible, I believe, out of any other materials he could have been formed. From this disagreeable draught we shall be able, I trust, by a proper disposition of light and shade, and from the influence and compression of external things, to produce *plump Jack*, the life of humour, the spirit of pleasantry, and the soul of mirth.

To this end, Falstaff must no longer be considered as a single independent character, but grouped, as we find him shewn to us in the play;—his ability must be disgraced by buffoonery, and his courage by circumstances of imputation; and those qualities be thereupon reduced into subjects of mirth and laughter:—his vices must be concealed at each end from vicious design and evil effect, and must thereupon

be turned into incongruities, and assume the name of humour only ;—his insolence must be repressed by the superior tone of Hal and Poins, and take the softer name of spirit only, or alacrity of mind ;—his state of dependence, his temper of accommodation, and his activity, must fall in precisely with the indulgence of his humours ; that is, he must thrive best, and flatter most, by being extravagantly incongruous ; and his own tendency, impelled by so much activity, will carry him with perfect ease and freedom to all the necessary excesses. But why, it may be asked, should incongruities recommend Falstaff to the favour of the Prince ?—Because the Prince is supposed to possess a high relish of humour, and to have a temper and a force about him, which, whatever was his pursuit, delighted in excess. This, Falstaff is supposed perfectly to comprehend ; and thereupon not only to indulge himself in all kinds of incongruity, but to lend out his own superior



wit and humour against himself, and to heighten the ridicule by all the tricks and arts of buffoonery for which his corpulence, his age, and situation, furnish such excellent materials. This completes the dramatic character of Falstaff, and gives him that appearance of perfect good-nature, pleasantry, mellowness, and hilarity of mind, for which we admire and almost love him, though we feel certain reserves which forbid our going that length; the true reason of which is, that there will be always found a difference between mere appearances, and reality: nor are we, nor can we be, insensible, that, whenever the action of external influence upon him is in whole or in part relaxed, the character restores itself proportionably to its more unpleasing condition.

A character really possessing the qualities which are, on the stage, imputed to Falstaff, would be best shewn by its own natural energy; the least compression would

disorder it, and make us feel for it all the pain of sympathy : it is the artificial condition of Falstaff which is the source of our delight ; we enjoy his distresses, we *gird at him* ourselves, and urge the sport without the least alloy of compassion ; and we give him, when the laugh is over, undeserved credit for the pleasure we enjoyed. If any one thinks that these observations are the effect of too much refinement, and that there was in truth more of chance in the case, than of management or design, let him try his own luck ;—perhaps he may draw out of the wheel of fortune a *Macbeth*, an *Othello*, a *Benedict*, or a *Falstaff*.

Such, I think, is the true character of this extraordinary buffoon ; and hence we may discern for what special purposes Shakespeare has given him talents and qualities, which were to be afterwards obscured, and perverted to ends opposite to their nature : it was clearly to furnish out a stage buffoon of a peculiar sort ; a kind of

game-bull which would stand the baiting through a hundred plays, and produce equal sport, whether he is pinned down occasionally by Hal or Poins, or tosses such mongrils as Bardolph, or the Justices, sprawling in the air. There is in truth no such thing as totally demolishing Falstaff; he has so much of the invulnerable in his frame, that no ridicule can destroy him; he is safe even in defeat, and seems to rise, like another Antæus, with recruited vigour from every fall; in this, as in every other respect, unlike Parolles or Bobadil: *they* fall by the first shaft of ridicule, but Falstaff is a butt on which we may empty the whole quiver, whilst the substance of his character remains unimpaired. His ill habits, and the accidents of age and corpulence, are no part of his essential constitution; they come forward indeed on our eye, and solicit our notice, but they are second natures, not *first*; mere shadows, we pursue them in vain; Falstaff himself has a dis-

tinct and separate subsistence; he laughs at the chace, and when the sport is over, gathers them with unruffled feather under his wing: and hence it is that he is made to undergo not one detection only, but a series of detections; that he is not formed for one play only, but was intended originally at least for two; and the author, we are told, was doubtful if he should not extend him yet farther, and engage him in the wars with France. This he might well have done, for there is nothing perishable in the nature of Falstaff: he might have involved him, by the vicious part of his character, in new difficulties and unlucky situations, and have enabled him, by the better part, to have scrambled through, abiding and retorting the jests and laughter of every beholder.

But whatever we may be told concerning the intention of Shakespeare to extend this character farther, there is a manifest preparation near the end of the second part of

Henry IV. for his disgrace : the disguise is taken off, and he begins openly to pander to the excesses of the Prince, entitling himself to the character afterwards given him of being *the tutor and the feeder of his riots*. “ *I will fetch off,*” says he, “ *these Justices. I will devise matter enough out of this Shallow to keep the Prince in continual laughter the wearing out of six fashions. If the young dace be a bait for the old pike,*” speaking with reference to his own designs upon Shallow, “ *I see no reason in the law of nature but I may snap at him.*” — This is shewing himself abominably dissolute : the laborious arts of fraud, which he practises on Shallow to induce the loan of a thousand pounds, create *disgust* ; and the more, as we are sensible this money was never likely to be *paid back*, as we are told that *was*, of which the travellers had been robbed. It is true, we feel no pain for Shallow, he being a very bad character, as would fully appear, if he were unfolded ;  
to

but Falstaff's deliberation in fraud is not, on that account, more excusable. The event of the old King's death draws him out almost into detestation.—“*Master Robert Shallow, chuse what office thou wilt in the land,—’tis thine. I am fortune’s steward; let us take any man’s horses. The laws of England are at my commandment. Happy are they who have been my friends; and woe to my Lord Chief Justice.*”—After this, we ought not to complain if we see poetic justice duly executed upon him, and that he is finally given up to shame and dishonour.

But it is remarkable that, during this process, we are not acquainted with the success of Falstaff's design upon Shallow 'till the moment of his disgrace. “*If I had had time,*” says he to Shallow, as the King is approaching, “*to have made new liveries, I would have bestowed the thousand pounds I borrowed of you;*”—and the first word he utters after this period is, “*Master Shal-*

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*low, I owe you a thousand pounds."* — we may hence very reasonably presume, that Shakespeare meant to connect this fraud with the punishment of Falstaff as a more avowed ground of censure and dishonour: nor ought the consideration that this passage contains the most exquisite comic humour and propriety in another view, to diminish the truth of this observation.

But, however just it might be to demolish Falstaff in this way, by opening to us his bad principles, it was by no means *convenient*. If we had been to have seen a single representation of him only, it might have been proper enough; but as he was to be shewn from night to night, and from age to age, the disgust arising from the *close*, would by degrees have spread itself over the whole character; reference would be had throughout to his bad principles, and he would have become less acceptable as he was more known: and yet it was ne-

cessary to bring him, like all other stage characters, to some conclusion. Every play must be wound up by some event, which may shut in the characters and the action. If some *hero* obtains a crown, or a mistress, involving therein the fortune of others, we are satisfied ;—we do not desire to be afterwards admitted of his council, or his bed-chamber: or if, through jealousy, causeless or well founded, *another* kills a beloved wife, and himself after,—there is no more to be said ;—they are dead, and there an end ; or if, in the scenes of comedy, parties are engaged, and plots formed, for the furthering or preventing the completion of that great article cuckoldom, we expect to be satisfied in the point, as far as the nature of so nice a case will permit, or at least to see such a manifest *disposition* as will leave us in no doubt of the event. By the bye, I cannot but think that the comic writers of the last age treated this matter as of more importance, and made



more bustle about it, than the temper of the present times will well bear ; and it is therefore to be hoped that the dramatic authors of the present day, some of whom, to the best of my judgement, are deserving of great praise, will consider and treat this business, rather as a common and natural incident arising out of modern manners, than as worthy to be held forth as the great object and sole end of the play.

But whatever be the question, or whatever the character, the curtain must not only be dropt before the eyes, but over the minds, of the spectators, and nothing left for farther examination and curiosity.—But how was this to be done in regard to Falstaff? He was not involved in the fortune of the play ; he was engaged in no action which, as to him, was to be completed ; he had reference to no system, he was attracted to no centre ; he passes through the play as a lawless meteor, and we wish to know what course he is afterwards likely to

take: he is detected and disgraced, it is true; but he lives by detection, and thrives on disgrace; and we are desirous to see him detected and disgraced again. The *Fleet* might be no bad scene of farther amusement;—he carries *all* within him, *and what matter* where, *if he be still the same*, possessing the same force of mind, the same wit, and the same incongruity. This, Shakespeare was fully sensible of, and knew that this character could not be completely dismissed but by death.—“Our author,” says the Epilogue to the Second Part of Henry IV. “will continue the story with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Catherine of France; where, for any thing I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already he be killed with your hard opinions.” If it had been prudent in Shakespeare to have killed Falstaff with *hard opinion*, he had the means in his hand to effect it;—but die, it seems, he must, in one form or another, and a *sweat*

would have been no unsuitable catastrophe. However, we have reason to be satisfied as it is;—his death was worthy of his birth and of his life: “*He was born,*” he says, “*about three o’clock in the afternoon, with a white head, and something a round belly.*” But if he came into the world in the evening with these marks of age, he departs out of it in the morning in all the follies and vanities of youth;—“*He was shaken,*” we are told, “*of a burning quotidian tertian;—the young King had run bad humours on the knight; his heart was fractured and corroborate; and a’ parted just between twelve and one, even at the turning of the tide, yielding the crow a pudding, and passing directly into Arthur’s bosom, if ever man went into the bosom of Arthur.*”—So ended this singular buffoon; and with him ends an Essay, on which the reader is left to bestow what character he pleases: an Essay, professing to treat of the courage of Falstaff, but extending itself to his whole character;

to the arts and genius of his poetic maker, SHAKESPEARE; and through him sometimes, with ambitious aim, even to the principles of human nature itself.

THE END.